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Fall 12-15-2012

## Satchmo

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### Recommended Citation

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Satchmo

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
The Creative Writing Program  
The Department of Drama And Communications

by

Callie Solano

B.A. University of New Orleans, 1990

December 2012

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## Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank my thesis committee for their notes and support through this process of chiseling this story into a functioning screenplay.

Then there is my mom, who told me often, "Whatever the mind can conceive, the mind can achieve." And for that, I'd like to thank Napoleon Hill for reaching into the vastness of the universe to grasp that thought and then send it spiraling into the consciousness of humanity.

I'd like to thank all of those buddhas, including Louis Armstrong, who truly exemplified the lotus flower in the mud.

I'd like to thank Jason Patterson for hiring me to write a grant and photo exhibit on Louis Armstrong's life in New Orleans, which ultimately inspired this script.

My gratitude would be incomplete without acknowledging this hot, muggy, decadent, old, beautiful city we call New Orleans, whose alluvial soil has been the fertile ground for so many beautiful creations.

And finally, to my friends and family for their loving kindness and support, and even to those who were obstinate obstacles. And thanks to my Buddhist friends and my practice, for without it, I may not have had the courage to chant through all the obstacles it has taken me to get here.

FADE IN:

1945

(All characters of African-American descent unless otherwise specified)

INT. QUEENS NEW YORK HOME - DAY

In a 1940s decorated bedroom, LUCILLE, 30, dressed in a nice travel skirt suit, places a folded shirt in an open suitcase containing perfectly folded clothes. LOUIS, 45, a man who smiles big and laughs with gusto, wears bifocals on the edge of his nose, sits at a desk writing a letter.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I thank you so much for taking care of a few personal things for me while I'm away. Please pay the monthly bill for that Cadillac and send my nephew Clarence his money too. "Cotton Club" is sure to be a fine movie.

LUCILLE

Louis, you ready?

Louis seals the envelope.

EXT. QUEENS NEW YORK HOME - DAY

A group of KIDS play ball on the street. A black car parks careful to avoid the ball and the kids. The DRIVER exits and knocks on the door. Louis and Lucille exit the home. The driver carries the bags. The ball hits the cab.

DRIVER

Hey, kids, watch it! Will ya? You'll have to pay for the damages.

Louis pulls some cash out of his pocket.

LOUIS

Those kids don't mean no harm.

The driver declines his offer.

DRIVER

I was just giving them a hard time.

LOUIS

Same with me.

He quickly puts his wallet back.

The kids run up to Louis.

KID 1

Mr. Armstrong, where you going?

LOUIS

Hollywood.

KID 2

Are you going to be in a movie again?

LOUIS

I just might.

KID 2

Can you take us to see the movie, Mr. Armstrong?

LOUIS

Sure, Uncle Louis'll make sure you see the movie.

LUCILLE

Now, kids, you be good while we're gone and mind your mamas.

LOUIS

Dat's right.

KID 1

Will you play for us before you go?

LOUIS

I'll playa something when I get back.

He pats them on the head. The kids run off. The driver closes the door behind Lucille then hops in the driver's seat, puts the car in gear and begins to maneuver around the kids.

KID 1

Bye Mr. Armstrong. Bye Mrs. Armstrong.

The kids run behind the car waving and yelling "Bye." Louis and Lucille wave.

INT. CAR - DAY

Lucille places her gloved hands over a small handbag on her lap. Louis reaches over to hold her hand.

LUCILLE

Those kids love you. I'll never forget what you told the pope about us having kids.

LOUIS

I know he got a big chuckle out of it too.

LUCILLE

Louis.

LOUIS

I just told him the truth, we were having fun trying.

He kisses her. She chuckles.

The city passes by...(old film stock of New York in 1945?)

INT. MANHATTAN APARTMENT - DAY

JOE GLASER, 55, white, pristinely dressed, reads a letter at his roll-top desk.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I want to think of her big fine ass sitting in that Cadillac while I'm on the road.

The letter is signed in purple ink, "Red Bean's and Ricely Yours, Louis Armstrong"

Joe laughs, reaches for a check ledger, opens it and begins to write a check.

INT. HOLLYWOOD DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Louis, dressed in a tuxedo, reads a letter.

JOE GLASER (V.O.)

I took care of everything. How's your book coming? I saw Lil; she asked about it.

INT. STAGE - DAY

Louis sits at a desk typing with musicians and a bandstand behind him. The drummer begins tapping to the rhythm of him typing and the rest of the band joins in.

INT. HOLLYWOOD DRESSING ROOM - DAY

A STAGE MANAGER enters.

STAGE MANAGER  
Five minutes, Mr. Armstrong.

As he leaves, Lucille enters behind him. She affectionately fixes Louis's tie. He smiles.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
After three fine wives and many years, I finally found the wife of my dreams.

He affectionately touches the typewriter on a table. Lucille smiles.

1901

EXT. JAMES ALLEY - NIGHT

The sound of TYPING fades to rain. A garbage can blows around CLINKING and BANGING against the street and houses. Louis still in a tuxedo watches the scene like a ghost standing in a bar doorway. He begins to PLAY his trumpet.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
I was born on the Fourth of July in the city of New Orleans in one of the toughest neighborhoods, in the back-of-town, called James Alley. They say the night was full of mischief.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S HOME - NIGHT

MAYANNE, 16, lies tangled in sheets, sweating and moaning. JOSEPHINE, 45, boils a pot of water. Wind HOWLS outside with the pouring RAIN.

JOSEPHINE  
The baby will be here any time now.

MAYANNE  
Where is he?



JOSEPHINE  
You know he don't need to be around here  
for this.

Mayanne cries out.

EXT. JAMES ALLEY - NIGHT

A GUNMAN tries to aim blinking through the rain. Another GUNMAN hides under a porch and shoots hitting the other one in the arm. ONLOOKERS watch the men in horror as they both shoot at each other, hitting arms and legs and going down. Louis, standing under an awning, plays an accompanying riff to the fallen gunmen.

ONLOOKER  
They're going to kill each other.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
At some of the bars in New Orleans there  
was a gunfight or a stabbing almost every  
night.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S HOME - NIGHT

Josephine places a towel on Mayanne's forehead.

JOSEPHINE  
Just keep breathing, girl. You're going  
to be alright.

EXT. JAMES ALLEY - NIGHT

POLICE load handcuffed, rain drenched men into a truck. The trash can BANGS into the side of the truck. Louis plays a RIFF on the trumpet and stops. A baby CRIES in the distance.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S HOME - NIGHT

Josephine hands a BABY wrapped in a blanket to Mayanne, who is now crying.

Louis stands in the corner and finishes his song.

MAYANNE  
It's over.

Josephine looks at the baby and to Mayanne in disbelief. Louis watches the scene and smiles.

JOSEPHINE  
Over? It's just beginning.

MAYANNE  
I'm not talking about him.

She gestures to the baby.

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG, 21, pushes through the door against the wind, drunk and excited.

WILLIAM  
I been getting drunk, so I'd be ready for this occasion.

The Baby cries.

JOSEPHINE  
We can see that. Now sit down before you upset the baby and get your wife riled up.

William takes his hat off and sits down.

MAYANNE  
Where have you been?

WILLIAM  
I told you, getting drunk. Isn't that what grown men do on these occasions?

JOSEPHINE  
Son, stop talking. You're just digging yourself deeper.

Josephine picks up the baby to show to him.

MAYANNE  
He's a boy.

WILLIAM  
He's a cute little fellow.

MAYANNE  
And he's not going to end up like you, never around, always running round town.

Josephine rolls her eyes.

JOSEPHINE  
Lord help me.

William lies on a blanket on the floor.

WILLIAM

I'm done with you woman. Done.

He closes his eyes and begins snoring immediately. Rain falls harder.

MAYANNE

Damn him. He could sleep at a time like this.

Josephine gives Louis back to her. She examines his face.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)

Little Louis, you're going to go to school. You're going to do good things in the world. You're going to do something good with all this mess. My angel.

MONTAGE

Mayanne and William argue. Louis sleeps in a basket near by, William slapping Mayanne. Mayanne slaps William. Josephine comforts the baby Louis. Mayanne packs her bags.

LOUIS (V.O.)

Mayanne and my father fought like cats and dogs when I was a baby, until, finally Mayanne left me in the care of my grandmother.

END MONTAGE

EXT. UPTOWN HOUSE - DAY

LOUIS, 5, wide-eyed with a big smile he uses like a weapon, runs in an uptown yard. A WHITE BOY, 4, runs behind him. Clothes on a line blow in the breeze while Josephine folds sheets in a basket.

LOUIS (V.O.)

She taught me to respect myself, to be a little man, a little responsibility.

A WHITE MAN, 30, carrying a briefcase and wearing a suit, walks through the yard. Louis runs under a sheet on the line right into a the man's leg.

Louis looks surprised then smiles and laughs.

JOSEPHINE  
Louis, what do you say to Mr. Breaux?

LOUIS  
I'm sorry, sir.

WHITE MAN  
It's okay, Louis.

He pats him on the head.

The other little boy runs up to him.

BOY  
Daddy!

He hugs the little boy.

WHITE MAN  
They play nice together during the day.

JOSEPHINE  
Only a little bit, sir.

The man picks up his little boy and carries him inside.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
That's just how things were for black folks, and I didn't see things changing anytime soon. Still, later in life, my best friend would be a white man.

EXT. JOSEPHINE'S HOME - DAY

Louis skips happily next to Josephine as they arrive at her apartment in an uptown home. A WOMAN, 22, conservatively dressed waits on the porch outside. When she sees them arriving she stands up watching.

WOMAN  
Mrs. Armstrong, you may not remember me, but I'm a friend of Mayanne's.

JOSEPHINE  
Yes.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
I watched them talking and got a strange feeling from this woman. I didn't like her. She was like a bad omen.

WOMAN

She wants him to take all of his stuff  
and come to live with her for good.

JOSEPHINE

I see. What on earth?

She plops on a step on the porch.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

Louis, you want to go to live with your  
Mama?

Louis looks at her bewildered.

WOMAN

She really needs him to help her out  
right now.

JOSEPHINE

I don't know how much help he's going to  
be, but he's well-behaved and very  
resourceful, the way I taught him to be.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S HOME - DAY

Josephine packs Louis's clothing into a bag.

LOUIS (V.O.)

Now, I knew I'd miss my grandmother, and  
I had no problem visiting my mother and  
my baby sister, who lived with us  
sometimes too, but I had become terribly  
afraid of this woman.

Josephine dresses him in a nice suit buttoning the top  
button.

LOUIS

Grandma, I don't think I should go.  
Who's going to take care of you?

She hugs him.

JOSEPHINE

That's my boy.

EXT. JOSEPHINE'S HOME - DAY

Josephine hands Louis's bag to the woman who takes  
Louis's hand. He pulls away and hurries to his  
Grandmother.

LOUIS  
I don't want to go.

Josephine grabs him abruptly.

JOSEPHINE  
Louis, stop that crying right here and now or I will give you something to cry about. Don't make me do that. Listen, you have got to be a big boy now.

She hugs him. As the woman pulls him away, he looks behind him to see Josephine. She waves holding back tears.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)  
I'll visit as soon as I can.

EXT. STREET - DAY

PEOPLE fill water jugs at a cistern. Louis and the Woman walk past them.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
I remember that year, there was such a drought that people resorted to using cisterns set up by the fire department and other sorts of businesses.

Louis (of 1945) walks through the scene playing his trumpet. Little Louis watch the people thirstily filling jugs, some sipping from them immediately. The woman brusquely drags Louis away.

WOMAN  
You better keep up with me if you know what's good for you. You hear?

INT. STREETCAR - DAY

The woman enters, pays, and walks past the white passengers to the back of the car. Louis sees an empty seat next to a young WHITE BOY and sits down. The woman yanks him out of the seat.

WOMAN  
Boy, what are you doing? You got no sense.

She drags him to the back of the car. The streetcar jumps to a start.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I had never ridden a streetcar before so  
I did not know the rules. In the melting  
pot of New Orleans, the streetcars had  
only been segregated since 1901, a few  
years before.

Louis watches the city through the small window of the  
street car. PEOPLE walk together on the sidewalks. A  
COUPLE holds hands.

LOUIS (V.O.)

But I knew it wasn't always like that.  
People used to get along fine before the  
days of Jim Crow.

As the car screeches to a halt, a TRUMPET is heard.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The woman drags Louis off the car and pulls him away. He  
looks around in wonder at the sound.

As they pass an open bar door, the sound gets louder and  
Louis sees a glimpse of JOE "KING" OLIVER, 25, a dapper,  
Creole looking fellow, playing the trumpet with his BAND.

Louis attempts to pull back to the open door but she  
holds him tighter.

WOMAN

Stop your squirming.

LOUIS

Please lady.

Farther down the street, he finally manages to pull away  
from the woman and runs back to the open door.

He stands in the door. Joe Oliver notices him and smiles  
then salutes him with his horn. Louis notices everything  
about this man, his clothes, his nice shoes, and the  
horn. The world fades away to the sound of the trumpet.

The woman grabs him.

WOMAN

How are you going to help your sick  
mother acting like this?

Louis looks up for a last minute glance at Oliver who has  
just finished his number.

OLIVER  
Did you see that kid?

Louis pretends to have a horn in his hand as he walks with the woman.

WOMAN  
Stop that!

When the woman is not looking, Louis returns to pretending he is playing a trumpet.

When she looks back at him, he stops.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - DAY

In a one room shanty with a bed divided by a curtain and a cot in the corner, Mayanne lies in bed very ill. She pushes herself up in bed as Louis enters with the woman.

MAYANNE  
My boy, let me see you.

He walks cautiously closer to the bed. MAMA LUCY, 3, plays with a rag doll in the corner then notices Louis and hides behind a chair peeping up at him.

LOUIS  
Hey, Mama Lucy.

MAYANNE  
You're such a good boy, ain't he?

WOMAN  
He'll do just fine.

MAYANNE  
Thank you for bringing him.

WOMAN  
I have other work to do today, I'm glad I could help.

MAYANNE  
And thank you for taking care of me.

The woman leaves.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
She suggested I call on you to help me.  
I need a little help keeping an eye on  
your sister and running errands and such.



LOUIS  
I can help, Mama.

MAYANNE  
Okay, hand me that list over there, that  
piece of paper.

Louis retrieves a torn paper from a counter.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
This is everything I need you to buy  
today. I'm going to make you some of  
your favorite red beans and rice for your  
coming home.

Louis looks bewildered at the list.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
You just give that to Mr. Joe. He's the  
grocer we shop with on this side of town.  
He'll know what's on that list.

She reaches in a tin can by the bed.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
And here's some money. This should cover  
it.

Louis still looks confused.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
You never been on your own, have you?

LOUIS  
No, Ma'am.

Mama Lucy pulls him.

MAMA LUCY  
Play, play.

MAYANNE  
You have a little sister now, and you  
have to be a big boy.

He looks at her shaky hand.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
Don't you worry, I'm not going to die on  
you. Your Mayanne will come out okay.  
You get going now. Take that sack in the  
corner for the groceries and medicines.

LOUIS  
I don't know if I can do it.

MAYANNE  
Sure you can. We're all depending on you, me and Mama Lucy and you are a good boy. You go down James Alley turn left, go toward the big red building and walk one more block to the corner and look around till you see Joe's Grocery.

Louis reluctantly picks up the sack and closes the door before Mama Lucy can follow him.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis exits Mayanne's and takes in his surroundings, buggies going down the street. The PIE MAN, 45, and mostly toothless, waves to Louis.

PIE MAN  
(singing) Pies, my man, pies, all kinds of pies, apple for you, lemon for your Mayanne, custard for your neighbor and all kinds of pies under the sun.

Louis looks at the change in his hand and back to the house and shakes his head, "No."

The Pie Man continues down the street. Louis follows making his way around the ADULTS that traverse the sidewalks and streets.

He sees the red building and has to cross the street. He looks both ways but hesitates, and a buggy rides by. Then he runs across dodging the walkers. Moving quickly, next to the grocery store, he runs right into BUDD, 8, barefoot and dirty with his two friends, SMILEY, 7, and FRED, 8. Budd grabs him by the shoulders hard.

BUDD  
What do we have here?

LOUIS  
Let go of me.

Budd pushes him away into Fred.

FRED  
Look Budd, he's scared.

LOUIS  
I ain't scared.

SMILEY

Sure he is. Look at him. Looks like an  
Ethel to me, all dolled up.

BUDD

Whatcha gone do, punch us?

Louis tries to get around the boys, but they block his  
moves.

SMILEY

Got ya.

BUDD

No, you're not getting away.

LOUIS

What do you want?

BUDD

What you got in your hands?

LOUIS

Nothing.

BUDD

Why you got that sack? You going to buy  
groceries for your mama? Ain't ya?

LOUIS

No.

The boys start pushing him to open his hands. He  
resists. MORRIS, 25, a clean-cut, straightforward, white  
guy, jumps off a wagon.

MORRIS

Shoo! Leave him alone.

Budd punches Louis in the face. Louis drops all the  
coins on the ground and holds his face. The boys grab  
the coins and run.

LOUIS

Wait, you rascals. That's for my mama.

Tears stream down his face. He opens his hand and only  
two coins remain.

MORRIS

Who's your mama, kid?

LOUIS

Mayanne.

MORRIS

I know Mayanne. Let me see what you got there.

Louis opens his hand to reveal two pennies.

LOUIS

My mama's sick. I told her I couldn't do this.

MORRIS

It's okay. Look, she's my neighbor, and neighbors take care of each other, right? You were going to Joe's Grocery?

Louis nods.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Me too. Come on, I'll walk you there. What's your name?

LOUIS

Louis.

MORRIS

Louis, I'm Morris, Mr. Kornofsky.

LOUIS

Mr. Korn...

MORRIS

Oh, Mr. Morris. It's okay, you can call me Mr. Morris.

INT. JOE'S GROCERY STORE - DAY

Morris, JOE, 50, energetic Italian accent, and BLACK BENNY, 32, tall, smooth guy, with a drum stick in his back pocket, all have a good laugh.

MORRIS

So when the fight was over, did she get her man back?

BLACK BENNY

It was ugly, Mr. Morris. Ugly.

GROCER JOE

All right, enough of that. Mayanne's kid is waiting to get back to his mama.

Joe places a loaf of bread in the bag.

GROCER JOE (CONT'D)  
The bread is on me.

MORRIS  
I got the rest.

Morris takes some coins out of his pocket.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
Later in life I learned that people said  
Mayanne did some hustling to earn money.  
I never saw it; and she was respected by  
everyone in the community.

Louis notices the sticks in Black Benny's pocket.

LOUIS  
What are those?

He takes the sticks out.

BLACK BENNY  
What, these?

Louis nods.

BLACK BENNY (CONT'D)  
Drum sticks.

GROCER JOE  
He's one of those musicians you should  
beware of.

BLACK BENNY  
Now, Mr. Joe.

LOUIS  
You're a musician? You know that guy who  
plays trumpet. He's real good.

BLACK BENNY  
Kid, I know a lot of guys who play  
trumpet and think they real good.

Black Benny exits.

Joe hands Louis the bags.

MORRIS  
You got that?

LOUIS  
Yes, sir.

GROCER JOE

Listen, kid, don't forget what I told you. You'll be okay in this world if you steer clear of the bar and musician crowd. Keep your nose clean.

He holds the door for Louis to leave. Another CUSTOMER enters. They continue their banter.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis sees Oliver walking down the street. He turns to head back home, then runs as fast as he can, dropping a bag of groceries in the process, which he scrambles to pick up before Oliver turns the corner and is gone. Louis runs after him, turns the corner and runs into Oliver talking to Black Benny. Louis drops the bag of groceries again, but this time, just stands there mesmerized.

BLACK BENNY

Oh, it's you, Joe.

Oliver helps Louis pick up the groceries.

LOUIS

I'm sorry Mister.

Louis flashes a smile.

OLIVER

Where you going to so fast? What happened to you; you run into a wall of dirt?

BLACK BENNY

Kid got into his first bar room brawl. Now, he's going home to his sick Mama, that he's going to single-handedly take care of.

OLIVER

You can do all that, huh, kid?

He hands Louis the grocery bag back.

BLACK BENNY

Now, you run along now.

Louis begins to walk away, then abruptly turns.

LOUIS

Mister, how do you play like that?

Oliver and Benny have a good laugh.

OLIVER  
So, you want to play the trumpet?

He nods.

OLIVER (CONT'D)  
You want to learn?

LOUIS  
Yes, yes, that was the best thing I ever  
heard in my whole life.

BLACK BENNY  
You hear that, Joe, in his whole life?  
You never heard me play drums, kid.

Oliver bends down close to Louis.

OLIVER  
You blow from here.

He holds his stomach.

OLIVER (CONT'D)  
And you control the sound from here.

He holds puckered cheeks.

OLIVER (CONT'D)  
And you create the sound from here.

He holds his chest.

OLIVER (CONT'D)  
That's your first lesson. Music comes  
from your chest, where your heart and  
soul live.

BLACK BENNY  
That may be where your heart and soul  
live. Did you hear what happened at  
Henry's last night? Run along now, kid.  
Your sick mother is waiting for you.

Louis pauses for a moment uncertain, smiles up at Oliver,  
who nods.

BLACK BENNY (CONT'D)  
She might die while you learn to play  
trumpet from this cat.

Louis gives him a piercing look then softens to focus on Oliver.

LOUIS  
Thank you. My name is Louis, Louis  
Armstrong.

OLIVER  
Joe Oliver.

BLACK BENNY  
Don't let him fool ya; he's King Oliver  
around here.

OLIVER  
You can call me Uncle Joe.

Louis smiles and turns away.

LOUIS  
(Softly) Uncle Joe. Thanks Uncle Joe.

As Louis walks away he hears.

BLACK BENNY  
That poor kid. He lives on James Alley,  
he won't ever be able to buy no horn.  
You're just giving him pipe dreams.

Oliver motions for him to shush.

OLIVER  
What happened at Henry's?

Whispering.

OLIVER (CONT'D)  
You don't want the kid to hear that. He's  
finding the beautiful music in this dirty  
world.

He laughs.

BLACK BENNY  
You're right. I play drums and all I got  
is drum sticks and borrowed drums half  
the time and don't even have a decent  
suit.

He looks at Oliver's decent day clothes.



OLIVER

If you stayed away from gambling and women, you might just have some nice threads.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - DAY

An out-of-breath Louis runs inside. The door slams. Mayanne, at the stove, is stirring a pot of stock.

MAYANNE

Wait a second, young man. You do not run inside my home like a cannonball blasting through. Where do you think you are? Now give me those groceries.

LOUIS

Yes ma'am.

She pours some soup in a bowl and places it on the table. Mama Lucy is already covered in a bib and spilling soup all over her.

MAYANNE

Sit down and eat something.

LOUIS

But you're the one who's sick.

MAYANNE

That's right, but some soup will make me better, with that medicine you got me.

She looks at him more carefully.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)

How'd you get that bump on your eye? Your first time out. And look at your nice clothes, all dirty, and your nice Sunday shoes, all scuffed up.

Louis takes stock of his clothes.

LOUIS

Yes, ma'am.

MAYANNE

Now what are we going to do with you? Sit down. Eat.

Louis obeys.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)

What happened?

LOUIS

I met King Oliver.

MAYANNE

I mean to your eye. Don't tell me King Oliver did that.

LOUIS

No, ma'am. Some boys. And I met Black Benny.

MAYANNE

I don't want you hanging around his kind. You hear me. King is okay, but you can stay clear of musicians.

LOUIS

That's what Mr. Joe at the grocery store told me. Oh, and Mr. Morris gave me some money to pay for the groceries.

MAYANNE

What happened to the money?

LOUIS

The boys took it. When he punched me, I dropped it. I'm sorry, mama.

She consoles him, hugging him.

MAYANNE

It's okay, Louis. You did good. You're a good boy. Now take those clothes off, so I can clean them up for you.

She begins to take his jacket off.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)

And tomorrow you're going to go to school.

LOUIS

School?

MAYANNE

You have to learn to read.

LOUIS

Yes ma'am.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

The Pie Man rides by.

PIE MAN

Pies, all the pies you want. Pies.

Louis steps into the street, a little more sure of himself now carrying a small satchel for school. Stepping around puddles and maneuvering around pedestrians with ease. He sees Morris coming down the road and waves. Morris pulls the wagon over.

MORRIS

How's your mama?

Louis reaches up to hand Morris some coins. Morris pulls him up on the wagon.

LOUIS

My Mayanne said to give you this. Wow, I'm on a wagon.

Morris takes the change. Louis eyes the tin horn hanging on Morris's wagon.

MORRIS

Can you play?

He takes it off the hook.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

I can't make it sound like anything but a screeching bird.

Morris hands the horn to Louis. He calculates, thinking for a moment, then places his lips on the horn, puts his fingers over the tabs and inhales deeply and then blows through the horn. At the end of a nice sound the horn makes a squeak that annoys Louis.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Try again. Not bad for your first try.

He holds one tab then another and to his surprise and Morris's, actually makes pleasing sounds.

Louis continues to play while Morris drives the wagon. A LADY waves. Louis stops playing.

LADY

I'll take that pot you have there. How much?

MORRIS

Two cents.

They exchange the money and the wagon pulls away.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Keep playing.

Louis continues for a moment.

LOUIS

Mr. Morris, I have to go to school today.

MORRIS

I saw the book satchel. I'm taking you to the school.

Louis keeps playing. PEDESTRIANS hear him and turn to wave.

EXT. SCHOOL - MORNING

The wagon pulls up as Louis finishes playing a simple TUNE. Louis goes to hand the horn back to Morris.

LOUIS

Mr. Morris.

MORRIS

Yes, Louis.

LOUIS

Maybe I can work for you riding on the wagon, and you can let me play the horn?

MORRIS

How bout you work for me playing the horn, and I'll let you ride on the wagon?

Louis shakes his hand.

LOUIS

Thank you, Mr. Morris. Can I start after school today?

MORRIS

I don't see why not. And after today, you need to ask your mama if it's okay if you work for me.

Louis waves and hurries into the school.

LOUIS  
I will, Mr. Morris.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Louis sits next to ISAAC, 5, and passes Isaac a piece of his sandwich.

ISAAC  
Your mama sure gave you some good lunch.

LOUIS  
Yeah.

Budd and the boys walk across the school yard like a gang headed right for Louis and Isaac. Isaac packs his lunch up to run away. Louis stops him.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Mr. Morris said you can't act scared with these kinds of boys. They'll just keep coming back harder than before.

Louis stays put.

ISAAC  
But he did that to your eye.

LOUIS  
I'll be all right.

ISAAC  
What if he does it again?

The boys are now right in front of them.

BUDD  
Look what we got here. A mama's boy, all he does is cry.

Louis tries to ignore them and keep eating his lunch, but Budd snatches his lunch away and Fred grabs Isaac's lunch.

ISAAC  
Hey.

Budd starts devouring the sandwich. Fred looks through a mostly empty bag.

FRED  
He ain't got nothing.

Louis stands up but says nothing.

BUDD  
What you gonna do?

Smiley tries to grab some of the sandwich. Budd pushes him away.

BUDD (CONT'D)  
Hey, wait a second.

He tears a piece off for Smiley and for Fred. They run off laughing. Louis smiles.

ISAAC  
How can you smile at a time like this?  
I'm still hungry.

Louis looks off dreamily.

LOUIS  
I get to play a tin horn.

EXT. WAGON - DAY

Louis plays the tin horn while Morris drives the wagon along the streets of Storyville. Scantily clad WOMEN stand outside in doorways waving. Morris pulls the wagon over and grabs a bag of coal to deliver to a GIRL, 13.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
Some of them women looked like kids to me  
and shouldn't been working in Storyville.

Morris returns and the wagon pulls away past more women in windows.

Morris turns a corner and pulls up next to a pawnshop.

MORRIS  
You want to come with me? I have to go in  
there for some business.

LOUIS  
Yes sir.

Morris helps Louis down off the wagon.

INT. PAWNSHOP - DAY

Black Benny examines a tuxedo at the counter with MR. BABIN, 50, a scruffy, intense man.

BLACK BENNY

Mr. Babin, I just want to borrow it for my next gig.

The bells on the door JINGLE as Morris and Louis enter.

MR. BABIN

Mr. Kornofsky.

Mr. Babin walks around the counter.

MR. BABIN (CONT'D)

(To Black Benny) You can't have the suit until you pay me what you owe me. (To Morris) What can we do for you today?

MORRIS

You can help Benny.

MR. BABIN

(To Benny) We're done, right?

Black Benny takes all of his money out of his wallet.

BLACK BENNY

Mr. Babin, here is most of what I owe you to borrow the suit. I'll pay the rest and bring the suit back. You know I'll be back.

Mr. Babin takes the money.

MR. BABIN

You better be back. I know where you live.

Black Benny takes the suit and hurries out. He nods to Louis who stands in the corner just mesmerized by all the stuff and trying to stay out of the way.

Morris brings a bag up to the counter.

MORRIS

I have some stuff for sale or trade.

MR. BABIN

What's the kid doing with you?

MORRIS

Plays the tin horn swell.

MR. BABIN

Hey kid, don't touch anything. You hear?

LOUIS

Yes Sir.

Morris and Mr. Babin go to the counter to look over items. Louis slowly meanders through the store, noticing suits of clothes and nice dishes and cracked dishes and old pots and new pots. The place is full of stuff from floor to ceiling.

Finally Louis sees an old, rusted cornet in the window. The sun hits its rim and makes it shine brighter when Louis looks at it. Louis is spellbound when Morris touches his shoulder.

MORRIS

Come on, Louis. We're done here.

MR. BABIN

You're not going to get a better deal than that.

MORRIS

Thank you for your time, Mr. Babin. I'll be back. Come on, Louis.

Morris finally notices what Louis is looking at.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

You like that horn, huh, kid?

MR. BABIN

Take that pesky kid with you. Don't need kids around here. I got enough trouble.

MORRIS

How much for the horn?

MR. BABIN

That kid can't buy that horn. Forget it.

MORRIS

How much?

Mr. Babin reluctantly goes over to the window and lifts the tag, which says thirty cents. Then looks at both of them.

MR. BABIN

Thirty-five cents.

LOUIS

I can't pay that.



MR. BABIN

No, I told you that. What's he, a kid from the alley? You sure you won't change your mind?

MORRIS

No, I don't believe so.

MR. BABIN

Keep your stuff, I'll keep my rubes, you Reuben.

MORRIS

Excuse me, what did you say?

MR. BABIN

Nothing.

He slams the door.

EXT. PAWNSHOP - DAY

Wagons pass on the street. Louis notices a nice car drive by.

MORRIS

You want that horn, don't ya kid?

LOUIS

I wish I could have that horn, Mr. Morris. I sure do.

MORRIS

Why don't you play real good on the tin horn and then maybe you can buy that cornet.

LOUIS

I don't think I like that man.

MORRIS

He's not a nice man, that you could bet on, but not everyone can be nice. What kind of world would that be?

He puts Louis on the wagon.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Let me hear you play that tin horn. Show that country bumpkin what you got.

EXT. STREET - DAY

MONTAGE

Louis plays the tin horn on the wagon. Louis plays the tin horn on the street while Isaac collects coins. Louis listens to a trumpeter on the street and mimics his sounds on the tin horn. Louis plays on the wagon with Morris. Louis plays on the street with Isaac.

END MONTAGE

Louis finishes a song. Isaac collects the money and gives Louis his share.

ISAAC

Your Mama's going to let you buy that horn?

LOUIS

I got a plan. I'm giving her all this money, so she can see that I can help. Then she'll let me buy that cornet. If it's still there.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - DAY

Mayanne pours a plate of pasta into a big bowl and places it in front of Louis. Louis begins to devour the pasta.

MAYANNE

Slow down, son. You're not in a race. Where's the horses? Remember food is made to be enjoyed. You got to take time to do that. And you got to enjoy what you got, cause you never know when it might be tough times.

LOUIS

Yes, Ma'am.

MAYANNE

Now, I'm going out with your Papa Gabe now. He's going to be a real good Papa.

Louis reaches in his pocket.

LOUIS

Mama, I got something for you.

He hands her the change.

MAYANNE

Boy, where did you get this kind of money? Lord, please tell me you didn't steal it.

LOUIS

No, Mama.

MAYANNE

Like those boys stole your lunch. Please, Lord, Jesus.

LOUIS

No, Mama.

MAYANNE

Your grandmother will be so disappointed.

LOUIS

No Mama, I played this tin horn Morris gave me.

He reaches behind him to grab the horn out of a sack. Mayanne examines it.

MAYANNE

He gave this to you?

LOUIS

Mama, you said I could ride the wagon with him as long as he wanted and I wasn't any trouble.

MAYANNE

Yes, I did, didn't I? And that's just an old tin horn. You can't get into any trouble playing a thing like that.

She pockets the money.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)

All right, as long as you stay out of trouble, you can keep playing.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Morris pulls the wagon to the side of the road to sell items to a LADY. When he finishes with the lady, Morris hands Louis the cornet that was in the window. Louis's eyes almost pop out.

LOUIS

Mr. Morris.

MORRIS  
What do you, think?

LOUIS  
This is my horn?

MORRIS  
Yes.

LOUIS  
Wow.

MORRIS  
Now, you are going to pay me back every  
penny.

LOUIS  
yes sir.

Louis tries a few notes and manages to make a clean  
sound. Morris leans over to help another CUSTOMER.  
Louis sees King Oliver leaving a store down the street  
and runs over to him.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Uncle Joe.

OLIVER  
Is that Little Louis?

LOUIS  
Yeah.

OLIVER  
What you got there?

LOUIS  
My own horn.

OLIVER  
Can you play it?

Louis begins to play. Oliver is surprised to hear how  
good he sounds. Morris drives the wagon over to him.

OLIVER (CONT'D)  
Kid's got chops.

MORRIS  
Hey, he's working for me; you can't have  
him.

OLIVER

Oh you just wait, a talent like this  
won't be riding on a junk wagon for long.

Louis can't keep the grin off his face. This grin fades  
when he sees Budd and the boys across the street. Oliver  
follows his gaze to the kids and so does Morris.

MORRIS

That's the ones that stole your lunch,  
huh?

OLIVER

Probably just hungry and have no food at  
home.

MORRIS

It's a shame.

LOUIS

I have an idea.

He waves the boys over.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Hey, Budd. Hey, Smiley.

They cautiously walk over.

After an awkward pause.

BUDD

What you want, Louis?

LOUIS

Mr. King Oliver, meet my new friends,  
Budd, Smiley and Fred.

OLIVER

Hey, boys.

The boys lighten up instantly.

BUDD

Hey, Mr. Oliver.

SMILEY

King Oliver, wow. My dad talks about you  
all the time.

OLIVER

All the time, huh? Hey kids, I'm on my  
way to a gig.

He shakes their hands. And salutes Morris. Louis climbs up on Morris's wagon.

FRED

You get to ride on that wagon?

LOUIS

Yep, sure do. I'll see you at school tomorrow, fellows.

The boys run down the street skipping and playing. Louis continues to play the cornet as they proceed down the street.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Louis hands extra sandwiches to Budd, Smiley and Fred.

SMILEY

Thanks, Louis.

They all wave and Louis and Isaac sit enjoying lunch.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I had solved that problem. Uncle Joe was right. Those kids were just hungry. And me sharing my delicious lunch, scraps from the restaurant my new Papa Gabe sometimes worked at and that fresh bread called hallah, Mr. Morris's mom made; we never had any scuffs again.

They eat their sandwiches in bliss.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis plays the cornet with Morris on the wagon riding around the city.

1910

LOUIS, 9, finishes with an impressive riff before hopping off the wagon.

LOUIS

Bye, Mr. Morris.

MORRIS

We did good today, Louis. Say hi to Mayanne.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - DAY

Louis, Mayanne, MAMA LUCY, 7, and GABE, 35, sit at the table finishing dinner. Louis and Mama Lucy remove the dishes.

MAMA LUCY

Mama, can we play a game of cards tonight?

MAYANNE

No, now you know it's a school night.

She takes a bottle off the counter and pours a drink, then hands it to Gabe, then pours one for herself.

MAMA LUCY

Now you kids go get in the bed.

As Louis goes to bed, he sees Gabe put a gun on a shelf. Mayanne sees that Louis has seen this.

MAYANNE

(Whispering) Don't you ever touch that gun. Do you hear me?

Louis shakes his head.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)

You forget you saw that.

LOUIS

I will, Mama.

She tucks him under the covers.

MAYANNE

That's my boy. I never have to worry about you.

When she turns away her expression says something else. She grabs her purse and heads out with Gabe for the evening.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Isaac plays a marching drum while Louis plays his cornet. Isaac sings a little section. A MAN drops a coin in their bucket. When they finish the song, Isaac collects coins and gives Louis his share.

ISAAC

I'll see you tonight at the fireworks.

Louis continues to play and nods. Oliver and Black Benny listen from across the street. Pedestrians drop coins while he plays.

Oliver joins in a riff from across the street - to which Louis replies, the two of them continue like this call and response until the song is over. Louis runs across the street to greet him.

BLACK BENNY

Go back and collect your money, kid.

Louis runs back to his bucket and pockets the change then hurries back.

LOUIS

Uncle Joe! Black Benny.

OLIVER

That's some chops you got there, kid.

BLACK BENNY

He's alright.

LOUIS

Teach me that song that goes (he hums a song.)

BLACK BENNY

Oh, I got to see this.

OLIVER

What, you think I don't know it?

Oliver begins to play the tune. Louis listens and watches Oliver's fingers, then plays a few notes before jumping into a duo.

BLACK BENNY

Yeah, he got it. Yes indeed.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - EVENING

Gabe helps Mayanne, dressed for an evening out, with her coat.

MAYANNE

You kids stay in tonight. You hear me?  
People going to be all high on tea and  
juice and all them fireworks.

They exit. Louis begins to clean up the dishes. He hears a tapping at the door and opens it for Isaac.



ISAAC  
You coming, right?

MAMA LUCY  
I'm telling Mayanne on you if you go.

ISAAC  
Oh, can I have some of that gumbo first?

Louis pours him a bowl of gumbo.

MAMA LUCY  
Don't they feed you? You dew-dropper.

He ignores her, too focused on scooping gumbo into his mouth.

MAMA LUCY (CONT'D)  
Louis, please take me with you.

LOUIS  
I can't. You know that.

MAMA LUCY  
I won't be no trouble.

ISAAC  
Trouble is her middle name.

MAMA LUCY  
No, it's not.

Isaac whispers something to Louis.

ISAAC  
Mama Lucy, look over here.

He points outside a window. Louis retrieves the gun from a shelf then hides it in his jacket.

LOUIS  
Got it.

ISAAC  
Good let's go.

MAMA LUCY  
I didn't see anything. What?

Louis goes to leave.

MAMA LUCY (CONT'D)  
Louis, please.

He closes the door.

Mama Lucy watches through the window as Louis and Isaac disappear into a crowd.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Louis shows Isaac the gun then hides it.

They continue walking and hear MUSIC coming from a bar.

Louis hovers by a doorway listening to jazz music.

EXT. CROWDED STREET - NIGHT

There is barely elbow-room to move. Louis and Isaac make their way through COUPLES and drunk GUYS and the REVELERS. FIREWORKS go off in the sky; both look up to see the colors in the night sky. Isaac points out Budd and the gang a few feet away in the crowd. Budd notices and heads over.

BUDD

Hey, it's that horn playing satchel mouth.

Louis smiles. The fireworks begin. Budd shoots a bullet in the air making a little bang. Louis takes out the bigger gun and shoots, startling all of them.

ISAAC

Can I try, Louis?

LOUIS

No, Isaac, this is my papa Gabe's.

Louis shoots the gun again in response to Budd's shot. A POLICE OFFICER grabs Louis's shoulders.

ISAAC

Oh, man.

Isaac takes off through the crowd. The officer holds Louis tighter.

POLICE OFFICER

Hand over the gun, kid.

Louis hands him the gun.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)

Who else was shooting?

Budd and the boys watch from a little distance. Louis looks at them.

LOUIS

No one, sir.

The boys run off.

POLICE OFFICER

I know someone else was shooting. If you tell me, I'll make it easier for you.

LOUIS

No one, sir. Please, I won't do it again.

Another POLICE OFFICER joins them. He guides Louis away.

POLICE OFFICER

Let's go. Stupid kid.

INT. POLICE TRUCK - NIGHT

Louis looks through the bars on the windows as the city passes by.

LOUIS (V.O.)

Mayanne was sure not going to like this.  
I let everyone down.

The car stops in front of a club where King Oliver is on stage. Louis peeps through the bars trying to see and hear better. Oliver looks up as the car rolls away.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I thought my life was over.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

A JUDGE looks over to a stoic Louis.

JUDGE

Are you certain you do not want to tell me who the other boys were? I may just decide to be lenient on your sentence.

LOUIS

No sir, I do not know, sir.

JUDGE

Louis Armstrong you give me no choice but to sentence you to serve the maximum, five years at the Waif's Home for Boys.

A gavel SLAMS down.

Mayanne's face drops. Josephine, next to her in the corner, rises to hug Louis as an officer leads him away.

JOSEPHINE

You be good now, and they'll let you out.  
You be good like I taught you to be.

Mayanne stays seated looking in the other direction.

LOUIS

Mayanne. Mama.

Mayanne approaches.

MAYANNE

I'm proud of you for not ratting, but  
damn you for not listening to me.

Mayanne holds her heart and walks away.

LOUIS

I won't see Mayanne again anymore? I  
tried to help out. I did.

JOSEPHINE

I know you did. I know.

The officer pulls him away.

OFFICER

Come on now. Time to go.

JOSEPHINE

If you just wouldn't taken that gun.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Mayanne and Josephine walk together.

MAYANNE

I knew something dreadful would come of  
Louis like this, being that he was born  
on that night with all the killings and  
the storm.

JOSEPHINE

Don't you think the boy's suffered  
enough?

MAYANNE

He's going to end up just like his father. I don't think I can take that.

JOSEPHINE

Mothers can handle a lot more than they think. And his father's not so bad.

MAYANNE

Yeah, and he's got another bunch of kids with another woman. My baby is in jail. He's going to end up...

JOSEPHINE

No, Mayanne, you got to keep the faith, child. Go to church and pray. Louis is going to be okay and so are you.

INT. WAIF'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Louis stands in line with three BOYS in a sparsely decorated cold room converted to accommodate doctors. A DOCTOR inspects one boy's ear. Louis steps up.

LOUIS (V.O.)

They had to inspect all the kids before sending them into the home.

The doctor listens to Louis's heart.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I felt like a bug.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The three boys and Louis sit with a small bag of new belongings (toothbrush etc.), while MR. DAVIS, 30, paces behind a desk.

MR. DAVIS

Here at the Waif's Home you will learn and you will work. You can learn woodworking. You will learn sports, and you will learn to read and write.

Louis sits looking down at the ground, somber. Mr. Davis looks straight at Louis.

MR. DAVIS (CONT'D)  
And I am all too familiar with the  
hooligans from James Alley, and I will  
not tolerate that kind here. Do you hear  
me?

Louis looks at the boy next to him.

MR. DAVIS (CONT'D)  
You.

He looks at a paper.

MR. DAVIS (CONT'D)  
Louis, do you hear me?

LOUIS  
Yes sir.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

In a crowded room of boys, Louis passes a bowl of red  
beans and rice to TINY, 12, a tall, big kid, sitting next  
to him.

TINY  
How come you not eating the beans and  
rice. This is the good stuff.

LOUIS  
It's not like my Mayanne's.

TINY  
You're new, huh? I'm Tiny, that's what  
they call me.

LOUIS  
Tiny, huh? Louis. Little Louis.

TINY  
That's funny. Tiny and Little Louis.

LOUIS  
Yeah, and neither one of us is really  
small.

Mr. Davis enters and passes through the room. Louis  
watches him.

TINY  
That's the guy who runs this place. He's  
as tough as steal.

LOUIS  
Yeah.

TINY  
The only kids he really likes are in the band. They get to go on the outside sometimes.

LOUIS  
Band?

TINY  
Yeah, he's got tryouts for new recruits today. You play?

LOUIS  
Yeah, I do.

TINY  
Well maybe it's your lucky day then, huh?

Tiny returns his plate to a bin near the kitchen.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Louis and Tiny wait with the other potential RECRUITS. The other MUSICIANS take their places in the stands with drums and flutes and tubas and finally a boy plays a rudimentary practice riff on a cornet. Now this perks Louis up.

LOUIS  
That's what I play, the cornet.

TINY  
Wow, you can really play that?

Mr. Davis shoots both of them a look.

MR. DAVIS  
What are you doing here?

LOUIS  
I'm here as a new recruit.

TINY  
And I'm here to watch.

MR. DAVIS  
I'm not talking to you. You, the kids  
from James Alley grow up to be criminals.  
Now get out of my sight.

LOUIS  
But Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS  
You want to question me?

Tiny pulls Louis away.

TINY  
No, Mr. Davis. He knows his place. Come  
on.

Mr. Davis returns to organizing the boys.

Louis and Tiny head to a field. Kids are playing  
baseball in the distance.

TINY (CONT'D)  
Man, he's got it out for you. I saved  
your tail.

LOUIS  
You mean?

TINY  
Oh, yeah, you don't want that. I can't  
wait to get out of here. Hey, let's go  
play baseball?

LOUIS  
Na, I never played.

TINY  
I can play. I'll teach you.

Louis watches the band from a distance dreamily.

TINY (CONT'D)  
Can you really play that thing?

Louis nods.

TINY (CONT'D)  
Just give it up.

Louis looks at him defeated.



INT. WOOD SHOP - DAY

MR. JONES, 35, demonstrates the proper sawing of a piece of wood.

MR. JONES

Place a hand here. Hold the other side tight. And try not to cut off a finger.

Louis looks horrified.

MR. JONES (CONT'D)

Who wants to be the first to try? You.

He points to Tiny. Tiny encourages Louis to volunteer with him.

MR. JONES (CONT'D)

Come on. What's your name?

LOUIS

Louis.

MR. JONES

Okay, Louis, you hold the board over here.

Louis awkwardly holds a piece of wood down for Tiny, who attempts to saw the wood.

MR. JONES (CONT'D)

A lot harder than it looks, huh?

Tiny saws harder.

MR. JONES (CONT'D)

There you go. Now you got it.

Louis almost lets go of the wood. Mr. Jones grabs the board before it flies up.

MR. JONES (CONT'D)

What the? I told you to hold it. See what happens.

LOUIS

yes sir.

MR. JONES

You don't listen do you?

LOUIS

yes sir.

MR. JONES  
You listen or you don't?

LOUIS  
No, sir.

MR. JONES  
Well you better start.

LOUIS  
yes sir.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Louis and other BOYS march with wooden rifles in formation. Louis can't keep up and has no idea what to do. Mr. Davis pulls Louis out of formation.

MR. DAVIS  
You will learn this. I'll march the evil right out of you.

LOUIS  
yes sir.

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

The BOYS sit in chairs in rows watching a silent film with "Black-faced" minstrel performers accompanied by a PIANO PLAYER. Louis laughs at the shenanigans on the screen. Now the CHARACTER tries to catch a train.

TINY  
(Whispering) Maybe we can escape from here, Louis?

LOUIS  
Shh, I thought you said they beat you to a pulp if you get caught.

Mr. Davis looks in the room.

TINY  
What are you...

LOUIS  
Shhh.

INT. WOOD SHOP - DAY

Louis, Tiny and the other boys stack wood in a pile.

TINY  
What you gonna do?

LOUIS  
I know what I'm going to do. I know.

TINY  
The only thing you can do is escape.

Mr. Jones holds up a broom.

MR. JONES  
I need a volunteer.

Louis's hand shoots up. He begins sweeping with a smile imitating the minstrel character in his expressiveness.

MR. JONES (CONT'D)  
Another.

Tiny reluctantly volunteers. Louis sweeps with such purpose, making sure all the dust has been removed before he moves on.

TINY  
There's a lot of dust here.

LOUIS  
Yep.

MR. JONES  
Okay, the rest of you help me move the table over here and pick up all the dust cloths.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

Louis finishes eating.

LOUIS  
(To Tiny) Watch this.

He rushes over to Mr. Davis who has just entered. Tiny's jaw drops.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Mr. Davis, I would like to volunteer to sweep the mess hall.

MR. DAVIS  
What are you up to, kid?

LOUIS  
I would like to pull my weight, sir.

MR. DAVIS  
You want to mop the floor too?

LOUIS  
yes sir.

MR. DAVIS  
Give him a broom and mop.

A BOY hands a broom to Louis.

LOUIS  
Thanks.

Tiny looks at Louis, exasperated with his plan and tries to sneak away. Louis smiles up at him.

LATER

The mess hall is quiet, except for the occasional sound of a chair being moved so the mop can slide under it. Tiny peeks in the doorway.

TINY  
Hey, you finished yet?

LOUIS  
This was a bigger job than I thought.

TINY  
I could a told you that.

Tiny slides on the floor making a little streak. Louis cracks up and then tries to imitate him. Louis playfully dances with the mop and slides.

Louis mops up the smudge from Tiny's shoes. Then purposefully makes another one and looks confused. Tiny cracks up.

Mr. Davis stands in the doorway.

MR. DAVIS  
Tiny, you want to pick up a mop and stop your chattering.

TINY  
yes sir.

MR. DAVIS  
That's what I thought.

Tiny picks up another mop in the corner.

TINY

I just came to tell you there was a movie tonight. It's movie night. Now, I'm working. See what you got me into. Louis, this is not going work.

LOUIS

But I have to try. Otherwise, I'll never get to play cornet in the band.

TINY

Oh, that again. Can you really play?

Louis just gives him a "really" look. And emulates playing as he dances around with the mop.

TINY (CONT'D)

All right, so you can play. I don't know if this scheme's going work.

LOUIS

Why? Don't have no faith, boy, I'll tell you that.

TINY

He has it out for you.

LOUIS

I already know that.

TINY

There was this kid, but he really was a bad ass. You, I couldn't say that about you.

MONTAGE

Louis carries wood.

Louis mops the hallway.

Louis sweeps the wood shop.

Tiny holds the dustpan.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I started volunteering to help as much as I could, hoping to get noticed by Mr. Davis.

END MONTAGE

INT. SLEEPING QUARTERS - NIGHT

Louis closes his eyes to sleep. In the next bed Tiny stares at the ceiling. Several other BOYS quietly chatter.

TINY  
(Whispering) It'll never work. He  
doesn't like people from James Alley.

Louis turns away.

LOUIS  
Well then I'll be the first. Leave me  
alone.

Mr. Davis enters the room.

MR. DAVIS  
Who's doing all that talking?

The room is completely quiet. Louis holds his breath.

MR. DAVIS (CONT'D)  
I thought so.

INT. WOOD SHOP - DAY

Louis and Tiny work on screwing a leg on a nearly completed table. Mr. Jones flips the table over.

MR. JONES  
Not bad. It actually stands up. I guess  
I did an okay job teaching you.

Louis turns towards the band preparing to practice in the distance. Mr. Jones goes over to other BOYS. Mr. Davis enters the shop.

MR. DAVIS  
Where's the kid from James Alley?

Louis quickly hides and Tiny follows. Mr. Davis quietly speaks to Mr. Jones who points in Louis's direction. Mr. Davis walks towards them.

MR. DAVIS (CONT'D)  
I guess I heard wrong; he really doesn't  
want to play in our band.

Now Louis looks panicked. He and Tiny try to affect that they've just walked up when Mr. Davis's turns.

MR. DAVIS (CONT'D)  
There you are? Louis, right?

LOUIS  
Yes sir.

MR. DAVIS  
So you want to play in the band?

LOUIS  
Yes sir.

MR. DAVIS  
I'm going to give you a chance. Get to  
band practice. Two-o'clock everyday, and  
don't be late.

LOUIS  
Yes sir.

A eager, triumphant Louis runs off towards the band,  
leaving a sullen Tiny.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Mr. Davis hands Louis a triangle. Louis awkwardly takes  
the instrument. Mr. Davis shows Louis a page of music.

MR. DAVIS  
When you see this marking, you cling the  
triangle. Let me hear you.

Louis clings the triangle.

MR. DAVIS (CONT'D)  
Like this. Do you read music? No. Well  
you're going to learn. This isn't a  
street brawl band; this is a real band.  
Okay, it goes like this.

He points and hums the piece showing Louis where his part  
is. He hands the triangle back to Louis.

LOUIS  
Thank you, Mr. Davis.

Louis takes his place and the band begins to play. He  
waits for his part, carefully listening.

1945

EXT. QUEENS NEW YORK HOME - DAY

Louis sits on his stoop surrounded by KIDS in the neighborhood.

LOUIS

When life gives you a triangle, you play  
a triangle. (To one of the kids) So you  
can play that damn drum with every thing  
you've got, and you'll see.

He resumes playing the trumpet for the kids.

1910

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Louis hits the triangle at the appropriate time. Mr.  
Davis notices and smiles. The band continues and again  
Louis hits the triangle at the correct time. The song  
finishes. Mr. Davis gathers the music sheets.

MR. DAVIS

Practice is the key to perfection,  
something you can never reach, but  
there's no harm in trying. You are  
released. Put your instruments away and  
hit the fields for baseball practice with  
Mr. Jones.

MONTAGE

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Louis, at home plate, swings and hits a baseball, runs  
and is tagged out at first base.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Louis plays triangle.

Louis speaks to Mr. Davis, who shakes his head and hands  
him a tambourine.

Louis plays the tambourine at first awkwardly.

Mr. Davis looks up disappointed.

Louis tries again this time with better success.

END MONTAGE



The song ends. Louis marches up to Mr. Davis.

LOUIS  
Excuse me, Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS  
Yes, Louis.

LOUIS  
Have I been doing okay on the tambourine?

MR. DAVIS  
Yes, another surprise from the kid from the alley. You're doing just fine, son.

LOUIS  
But Mr. Davis, I appreciate you letting me play in the band.

MR. DAVIS  
You still hankering to play the cornet again, huh? How bout I let you play the snare drum soon. We'll see how you do.

LOUIS  
Yes, sir.

Louis walks away deep in thought and sullen.

MR. DAVIS  
Hey, don't look so happy.

LOUIS  
No sir, yes sir. I'll play that snare drum, you'll see.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Louis and Tiny wait for a turn to bat. While another player bats and others play positions in the field.

LOUIS  
I'm not sure if Mr. Davis is ever going to let me play cornet.

TINY  
I know. I don't think I'm ever getting out of here. Seems like I've been in here forever. Maybe we could get out of here together.

LOUIS  
Stop talking nonsense.

TINY  
You could play the cornet, and I could  
collect the money.

LOUIS  
You'd collect the money, huh?

TINY  
Yeah, and protect you, make sure no one  
took advantage, you know like a, what do  
you call them guys that do that.

LOUIS  
I know you're a baby grand, but you're  
not hard boiled.

TINY  
So you think I ain't got what it takes,  
huh?

Tiny walks over to home plate preparing to swing. He  
swings and misses the ball.

LOUIS  
Go Tiny, hit it out of the park. Show me  
what you got, slugger.

MONTAGE

Tiny hits a triple. Louis hits him home.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Louis plays the snare drum.

Louis plays snare drum better.

Mr. Davis notices.

Louis speaks to Mr. Davis. Mr. Davis shakes his head,  
"no," and hands him an alto horn.

Louis plays the alto horn.

Mr. Davis notices.

Louis plays the alto horn better.

Mr. Davis notices.

Mr. Davis hands Louis a bugle.

Louis plays a loud riff.

One of the kids looks over at him.

Mr. Davis smiles.

Louis plays the bugle another day.

The song finishes.

END MONTAGE

Louis walks away to meet Tiny.

MR. DAVIS

Louis!

Louis stops.

TINY

I think he's calling you. Probably in trouble, man.

MR. DAVIS

Louis.

TINY

You better go see what he wants.

Louis returns to Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS

Little Louis with the big lungs. Is that you?

LOUIS

Yes sir.

Tiny waits in the distance.

MR. DAVIS

I thought you wanted to play the cornet?

LOUIS

Yes sir, I do. Yes, sir.

He reaches in a bag and takes out an old rusted cornet.

MR. DAVIS

I found this one. It's all rusted and old, been locked away.

LOUIS

No, that's fine.

He hands the cornet to Louis, who eyes it in amazement, examining it carefully. Where Tiny was standing, the older Louis in a suit stands there watching.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I never thought this day would come. I was determined to show Mr. Davis that I was not the snout nosed kid he thought I was but a real musician.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Louis scrubs the cornet under water at a large sink while Tiny watches.

TINY

How long you gotta clean that thing?

LOUIS

Until it's clean. I can't believe it finally happened.

TINY

Me, neither.

LOUIS

You don't sound happy for me.

TINY

I'm happy. I'm so happy.

LOUIS

Don't feed me that line.

TINY

It's just that I'm leaving this joint soon.

LOUIS

Why are you not jumping out of your skin feeling like the cat's meow?

TINY

You want to go with me?

LOUIS

Sure, when they let me out.

TINY

Sometimes you gotta make things happen yourself. You can't wait for someone to unlock the door. You gotta make your own key.

Tiny leaves Louis deep in concentration washing each piece of the horn.

LOUIS

Yeah, you gotta make your own way, make your own luck. Hey, hand me that towel. Tiny? Tiny, where'd you go?

He grabs a towel from a shelf and sets the horn down to dry.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Louis and Tiny work in a nearby field picking up debris.

TINY

Louis, I know you finally got that horn you been pining over. You know they never going to let you out of here.

LOUIS

Why you say things like that, Tiny?

TINY

Cause it's true.

LOUIS

I'm going to be so good, they have to let me out of here.

TINY

Maybe you'll be so good Mr. Davis will want you to play in the band forever, and you'll never see your Mayanne again.

LOUIS

Tiny, that is not the way it is, and you know it.

TINY

Louis, look.

He points to a large segment of field.

TINY (CONT'D)

If we both ran out into that field, we could get away. We could disappear and go back home.

LOUIS

And then they'd come and find us. Then what?

TINY

No, they wouldn't care about no couple of James Alley kids.

A bell rings. BOYS walk over to a bench where Mr. Jones has brought some sandwiches.

LOUIS

Come on, let's eat. You'll feel better.

Louis begins heartily eating. Tiny pockets his sandwich and grabs another. He pockets that one too.

TINY

Hey, let's go sit under that tree.

LOUIS

Mr. Jones, can we sit over, under the tree?

MR. JONES

Help yourself.

Under the tree, Louis sits down. Tiny surveys the horizon.

LOUIS

Get that out of your mind.

TINY

You sure you're not coming. I could help you out there.

Tiny drops his sandwich and runs off as fast as he can. Louis hops up.

LOUIS

Tiny, no.

Mr. Davis is talking to Mr. Jones, both see Tiny.

MR. DAVIS

Who's the fastest? Johnson, go get him. I'm right behind you.

JOHNSON, a tall, built boy takes off fast. Both men and the other boys follow. Louis reluctantly follows in the rear.

Johnson, catches Tiny and pulls him down. Tiny punches Johnson and continues to run. Johnson catches him easy, runs in front of him, this time holding a fallen tree branch as a bat.

JOHNSON  
I will whip you with this, stop!

MR. DAVIS  
Stop!

Mr. Davis grabs Tiny.

MR. DAVIS (CONT'D)  
You want to run? I'll show you. Come  
with me.

He and Mr. Jones pull Tiny away.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Louis sits looking at his untied shoelaces. Mr. Davis  
sits across from him.

MR. DAVIS  
Louis, I'm so disappointed in you.

LOUIS  
But Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS  
Let me finish. The two of you have been  
like hanging together like beans and  
rice. You knew what he was going to do,  
and you did nothing to stop him.

LOUIS  
Mr. Davis, please, I tried to talk sense  
into him.

MR. DAVIS  
Louis, you are going to pay for this too.

LOUIS  
Yes sir.

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

Tiny is tied to a table. All the BOYS at the home are  
gathered around. Mr. Davis pulls Louis forward.

MR. DAVIS  
You're going to watch this right here up  
front. See what you could have  
prevented. There's extra for him, since  
you didn't say anything. Is that okay,  
Louis? I didn't hear you.

LOUIS

Yes sir.

Mr. Davis begins whipping Tiny with a strap. Louis looks on in horror.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

The sound of the WHIPPING and Tiny's gasp and screams fades to Louis playing the cornet with the band.

Mr. Davis smiles uncontrollably hearing Louis play.

MR. DAVIS

(to himself) Shit.

1945

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Louis types strategically on his typewriter while hills roll by outside the window of the train.

LOUIS (V.O.)

That beating worked its magic even though I was scared out of my mind. All I wanted to do was get out of there as soon as I could. Because we were on our best behavior, Mr. Davis let us play the outside gigs.

1910

EXT. STREET - DAY

The Waif's band plays and marches in a parade. The streets are lined with PEOPLE dancing and clapping. Louis plays beautifully.

Oliver watches from the sidelines. Louis salutes him with his horn playing.

Oliver bows and tips his hat.

1915

LOUIS, 15, still raggedy but more confident, continues playing. Mayanne watches Louis. Gabe claps and shouts.

GABE

That's Mayanne's boy.



Louis sees her and smiles and waves. Mayanne just watches him, not moving, stoic. Gabe waves back at him.

Louis pauses in playing.

LOUIS  
Mayanne! It's me.

Mr. Davis gives him a look that says he'd better play or his head will be on a block. Louis halfheartedly plays, pausing to look over at Mayanne.

GABE  
When you going to forgive that boy?

MAYANNE  
When I'm good and ready. Taking things that don't belong to him. I taught him better than that.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
I knew Mayanne was angry at me. It broke my heart. I hoped time would heal what ailed her.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Louis rehearses with the band. Mr. Davis is pleased.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
I was doing a darn fine job, Mr. Davis said and getting used to the Waif's home. But I was more homesick than ever after seeing Mayanne.

INT. WAIF'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Louis knocks on the door. Mr. Davis sits reading over papers.

MR. DAVIS  
Come in. Sit down.

LOUIS  
Mr. Davis, I wanted to ask you if I could learn more about reading music.

MR. DAVIS  
Louis, you've been reading music now for a few years and doing fine.

LOUIS  
I know, but I could be better.

MR. DAVIS  
You have a natural style that more  
reading won't help. I don't say that  
lightly. You miss home, huh?

LOUIS  
I been missing my Mayanne's cooking, not  
that the cooking here isn't good .

MR. DAVIS  
Thank you. Here.

He passes the papers over to Louis.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - DAY

William sits at the table. Mayanne is chopping an onion.

WILLIAM  
You know he's going to want to live with  
you. He's never lived with me.

MAYANNE  
I can't control him. It's my fault he  
got into this mess.

WILLIAM  
I have four other mouths to feed.

She shoots him a look.

MAYANNE  
I been taking care of him all that time,  
and you can't do nothing?

She stops and throws an envelope at him.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
Take him.

WILLIAM  
He should stay with you, Mayanne. Look.

MAYANNE  
No, he should stay with his father for a  
change. Maybe things will be different.

WILLIAM  
Are you crying?

MAYANNE

I'm cutting an onion, damn it!

WILLIAM

I never saw you cry when you cut an onion before.

MAYANNE

That's cause you weren't around enough to see me crying. Now go get your kid from the courthouse, tomorrow, and don't be late.

Before closing the door on his way out.

WILLIAM

You can have him back if you change your mind.

MAYANNE

I won't change my mind. Now get out.

He closes the door and exits. Mayanne has to sit down; she is sobbing uncontrollably.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

Louis carries a small bag and casually chats with a few of the boys.

TINY

I get out next week.

LOUIS

Don't do anything stupid.

TINY

Ah, no, I think I learned that lesson. You think we'll see each other on the outside.

LOUIS

Sure we will.

TINY

So, you going to get some of the fine cooking from Mayanne you been dreaming about.

LOUIS

For sure, I can't wait to see her. She has got to have forgiven me by now.

Gesturing to Louis's horn case.

TINY  
Davis letting you keep the horn?

LOUIS  
Yeah.

They hug good-bye, and Tiny carries his bag.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

An OFFICER walks Louis in front of the judge, where William waits. A JUDGE looks over some papers.

LOUIS  
(Whispers) Where's Mayanne?

WILLIAM  
She's not coming.

INT. WILLIAMS HOME - DAY

MONTAGE

Louis practices the cornet in the kitchen while CHILDREN run through chasing each other.

MRS. ARMSTRONG, 30, worn-out and tired stirs a pot on the stove.

Louis politely passes a half-eaten bowl of gumbo to the dog.

A baby screams as Mrs. Armstrong tries to feed it.

William runs out in the morning dressed for work at a lumber yard.

Mrs. Armstrong hands the baby to Louis and follows William outside.

END MONTAGE

EXT. WILLIAM'S HOME - MORNING

Mrs. Armstrong follows William. A ball rolls in her path, she kicks it away.

MRS. ARMSTRONG  
William Armstrong!

WILLIAM  
Yes, that's still my name.

MRS. ARMSTRONG  
He is eating us out of house and home.

WILLIAM  
He doesn't even like your cooking.

MRS. ARMSTRONG  
What? That's it.

He grabs her arm.

WILLIAM  
Wait a second. What are you going to do?

INT. WILLIAMS HOME - MORNING

Louis precariously holds the baby who has begun to cry and tries to hear the conversation happening outside the screen door.

Mrs. Armstrong enters slamming the door. She hands Louis a mop.

MRS. ARMSTRONG  
You are going to have to earn your keep from now on. I want you to mop the floor. You know how to mop a floor?

LOUIS  
I know how to mop a floor.

He hands the baby to her and takes the mop.

MONTAGE

Louis mop the kitchen floor.

Kids running through the kitchen, while Louis attempts to avoid being trampled.

Louis putting the mop away.

Louis helps with the cooking, chopping, adding salt.

END MONTAGE

Mrs. Armstrong looking at him angrily.

MRS. ARMSTRONG  
Why you adding more salt to that? You  
trying to kill us?

Louis holds his neck and pretends to fall before  
collapsing into a chair.

LOUIS  
No.

MRS. ARMSTRONG  
Something wrong with you, boy? I know you  
think I can't cook.

Louis goes for the door.

LOUIS  
No, that's not true.

MRS. ARMSTRONG  
Now you're a liar. That's right, get  
out, run off like your father. He's  
never around, like an old tom cat. I bet  
you're just like him.

LOUIS  
No.

She sees the horn hidden behind his back.

MRS. ARMSTRONG  
Get out! And take that damn thing with  
you.

EXT. WILLIAM'S HOME - EVENING

Louis makes his way around running kids and breathes as  
if he's out of prison. He looks behind him as if someone  
might chase him down and trots down the street.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Louis, Isaac and Black Benny finish playing a song, Benny  
tapping on a garbage can and Isaac passing a hat with  
Louis belting out the cornet.

LOUIS  
Isaac, man it's good to see you again.

Benny passes him a giant beer they are sharing.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
And you too Black Benny.

ISAAC  
You better drink a big gulp; that thing  
will be gone after Black Benny chugs it  
down.

Louis takes a bigger sip and almost spits it out as he  
sees Mayanne across the street staring straight at him.

LOUIS  
Take this, boys.

He hands them the beer and crosses the street. Mayanne  
turns away and continues on her way. He catches up to  
her.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Mayanne, wait.

MAYANNE  
You're a disappointment. You play music  
and run around just like your father.  
You don't listen when I told you not to  
touch your Papa Gabe's gun.

LOUIS  
I'll never do it again.

MAYANNE  
You better never do it again. You get  
out and go right back to hanging with  
Black Benny. (Yelling) Benny, you  
better not lead my son astray.

She turns away again, leaving Louis standing on the  
street watching her. Isaac joins him.

ISAAC  
She'll be all right. She'll get over it.

LOUIS  
No, she won't. I'll never have that kind  
of fine cooking again.

ISAAC  
Is that all you think about.

Louis holds up his horn and smiles.

LOUIS  
Yes, and music.

INT. WILLIAM'S HOME - DAY

William sits at the table handing Louis a suitcase.

WILLIAM

She packed your things up. See, we can't afford to feed you, not with all the mouths I'm feeding round here.

LOUIS

Where are you sending me? Do I have to go back to the Waif's home?

WILLIAM

No, you don't go to places like that because your father can't afford to feed you.

Louis relaxes in his chair like a weight has been lifted.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I love my papa, but I couldn't have been happier.

William picks up his bag. One of the boys grabs his leg.

BOY

Louis, where you going?

WILLIAM

Let him go. He's going to his mama's.

BOY

Okay. Why?

WILLIAM

Because he is.

The boy runs off after another sibling.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I know I haven't been much for you.

He hands him a few dollars.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Take care of your mama.

Louis looks at the dollars.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Put that away fore she sees it. I'll never hear the end of it.



Louis pockets the cash.

LOUIS  
Thanks Papa.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - DAY

Mayanne watches Louis shovel spoons of red beans and rice in his mouth.

MAMA LUCY  
He can still eat.

MAYANNE  
Sh, what happened after that?

LOUIS  
Tiny? He got whipped, worsed whipping I ever seen in my life.

MAYANNE  
I seen some bad whippings.

MAMA LUCY  
Me too.

MAYANNE  
Girl, you have not seen a bad whipping in your life.

Mayanne picks up her purse and puts on lipstick.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
Things went back to usual with me and Mayanne and Mama Lucy.

MAYANNE  
I'm going to meet your Papa Gabe out tonight. You both stay home.

She hugs Louis.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
I'm so glad to have you back, son.

LOUIS  
Me too. I know.

Mayanne heads out. As soon as she leaves, Louis grabs his horn and goes for the door. Mama Lucy grabs his arm.

MAMA LUCY  
You're not going anywhere.

LOUIS

I can play on the street at least and make some change, maybe help out around here.

MAMA LUCY

That's what got you into all that trouble in the first place. You beat me at cards, you can go out.

She shuffles the deck like a pro.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I knew I was staying home that night.

INT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

King Oliver and his BAND play to a packed audience.  
HENRY PONCE, 50, a robust Frenchman, looks at his watch.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - NIGHT

Mayanne, Isaac, Mama Lucy and Louis enjoy a pasta dinner.

MAYANNE

Louis, I saw Morris today; he said you can work with him again.

LOUIS

Oh, man, Morris, he was a great cat.

MAYANNE

He's been asking about you since you got home.

Isaac looks around urgently.

ISAAC

Louis, what time did...

LOUIS

Isaac, Mayanne's got dessert for us; I almost forgot.

MAYANNE

What dessert?

MAMA LUCY

Mayanne, are you holding out on us. Are you bringing the cake to Papa Gabe?

MAYANNE

Mama Lucy, you should be ashamed of yourself.

Mayanne grabs her purse.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)

I'm going out. Isaac, you play cards with Mama Lucy. Gabe's not allowed. She takes all his money.

MAMA LUCY

And Louis's too.

LOUIS

You're not taking all my money.

MAYANNE

Isaac, you've been quiet all night. Don't you go getting my son arrested again, do you hear me?

ISAAC

Yes ma'am.

Mayanne leaves. Isaac peeks through the window watching Mayanne walk farther down the road.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

She's gone.

Louis grabs his horn.

LOUIS

You think I'll be too late?

ISAAC

No way, man they'll play till sun up.

MAMA LUCY

No, you're not going.

LOUIS

It's Papa Joe King Oliver. I need to see him. Maybe he can get me a real gig and I can make real money.

ISAAC

Then he can give you money to buy a new dress.

She looks at her dress.

MAMA LUCY  
All right. I won't tell. But if you get  
into trouble...

INT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Louis and Isaac weave through the mesh of dancing  
COUPLES. Oliver nods at Louis. Louis heads for the  
stage. A WOMAN, 18, stops Louis in his tracks. She dances  
in front of him not letting him pass. She grabs his  
hands to make him dance with her. He tries to be polite  
and escape at the same time.

LOUIS  
You are real pretty and all, but I need  
to get to the stage.

WOMAN  
You play?

He holds up his horn.

LOUIS  
I guess you didn't see this.

WOMAN  
Oh, I guess you do.

She helps him to the stage.

WOMAN (CONT'D)  
You have to promise when you finish  
playing to buy me a drink.

LOUIS  
Ah, I'm not sure I can do that.

WOMAN  
No money, huh? Look kid, I'll buy you a  
drink.

LOUIS  
Okay.

Louis goes over to the stage. Oliver gestures for him to  
join him. Louis begins playing his horn in accompanied to  
Oliver as he enters the stage area. Oliver turns to hear  
how good he sounds.

OLIVER  
Folks this is Little Louis.

The woman watches from the side. The band continues to play. Isaac schmoozes some women at the bar. Henry notices Louis's playing and motions to the BARTENDER.

PONCE  
(To the bartender) Kid's alright.

The bartender mechanically hands Ponce another shot.

BARTENDER  
Yeah, he's alright.

The band finishes the song. Isaac motions for Louis.

OLIVER  
Little Louis, folks, kid from the neighborhood.

BARTENDER  
How'd you get Oliver to play this joint?

Ponce rubs his fingers together.

Louis is again confronted by the woman who is now very drunk.

WOMAN  
Come on, I said I'd buy you a drink.

BARTENDER  
What'll it be, pal?

Louis looks uncertain.

WOMAN  
He'll have a brown straight up, same as me.

The bartender pours the drink. Louis takes it and smells it.

WOMAN (CONT'D)  
You gonna belt it down or sip it?

Louis shoots the drink.

LOUIS  
(Gasping) I know how to drink whiskey.

WOMAN  
You do, huh? How'd you learn a thing like that?

LOUIS  
My Mayanne.

WOMAN  
Mayanne's your girl?

LOUIS  
No, she's my mama.

The woman laughs.

WOMAN  
Figures. Come on, dance with me.

They move into the crowd. Louis passes near Isaac who is also dancing and is a much smoother dancer.

ISAAC  
Looks like you got your hands full.

Isaac moves his hands down his partner's back.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Nice cake.

Louis smiles. As they dance, the woman spills her drink all over Louis.

LOUIS  
Ah, Lady, this is my only nice clothes I got.

She dabs the mess with her hands.

WOMAN  
Come on sugar, you gonna be okay.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - NIGHT

Mayanne lies wide awake. Louis sneaks in and gently closes the door. He turns to see Mayanne quietly staring right at him. He stands still.

MAYANNE  
You reek.

She quietly gets out of bed, moves closer to him and slams a chair down. Mama Lucy stirs in her sleep.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
Come here.

He cautiously walks over. She slaps him on the head.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)

If you would have come home earlier, I would never know, but not for your clothes. What'd you do go swimming in it?

LOUIS

Now, Mayanne, why would I go swimming in...

He does a light dance step around Mayanne.

MAYANNE

Don't you Mayanne me.

LOUIS

Uncle Joe was playing.

MAYANNE

Music, I should have known. What you doing in that place?

LOUIS

Mr. Ponce gave me a gig. Mama, I can make some money.

MAYANNE

One gig ain't going to make you no money. You want to drink?

LOUIS (V.O.)

I thought she was going to pound the living daylights out of me. Instead she decided to teach me a lesson.

MAYANNE

I know it's whisky you been drinking.

LOUIS

I had one shot.

MAYANNE

I know what whisky smells like, and that's more than one drink.

LOUIS

A woman...

MAYANNE

Now you going get messed up with some woman. Who is she? I'll find her and I'll, I'll...

LOUIS  
It's not like that, Mama.

MAYANNE  
It's not? Well, I'll tell you what, it's  
bout time I took you out to learn you a  
few things about drinking. Now go to bed.  
You going to need your sleep when I get  
through with you.

INT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Louis and Mayanne enter together. It's early so there's  
just a few REGULARS sitting around.

LOUIS  
Let me introduce you to Henry. He's going  
to be my boss.

MAYANNE  
Oh, you do that.

HENRY  
Mayanne, so this is your son. I should  
have known. Kid came in here playing up  
a storm.

MAYANNE  
And reeking is what I smelled. I'm going  
to teach my kid here how to handle  
himself, Henry.

HENRY  
Mayanne can show you that.

MAYANNE  
He's got to learn to drink, and I'm going  
to teach him so he doesn't come home  
smelling like a brewery like he did last  
night. Is it true you hiring Louis to  
work for you?

HENRY  
I gave him one gig this week, just to see  
how he does.

MAYANNE  
He's going do what he is made to do I  
guess.

MONTAGE

Mayanne hands Louis a shot. They both shoot shots.



Int. Various Bars - night

Mayanne and Louis attempt dancing together.

Mayanne drinks another drink.

Mayanne shoots another shot.

A BARTENDER hands Louis a beer.

Isaac drinks with them.

Louis finishes a beer.

Mayanne downs another shot.

END MONTAGE

INT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

The place is packed. Louis, Isaac and Mayanne stumble in the door. A MAN drags Mayanne away to dance. Louis and Isaac head for the bar.

ISAAC

Man, your mama can dance.

Louis hits him.

LOUIS

That's my mama.

ISAAC

Sorry.

DAISY, 18, a waif of a woman, prances by and catches Louis's eye.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

She ain't got no meat on her bones.

LOUIS

She's still a pretty thing.

ISAAC

She could be somebody's Mama.

LOUIS

She ain't nobody's Mama.

Isaac goes of to another girl. Daisy walks up to Louis and takes the seat next to him.

DAISY  
I seen you play.

LOUIS  
When? What was I playing?

DAISY  
Last night. You know what you was playing. Why you asking me? Anyways, you played good.

LOUIS  
Thank you. You hungry?

DAISY  
Sure.

Louis takes a sandwich wrapped in paper out of his pocket. Mayanne pulls him away to introduce him to her FRIENDS and the man she is dancing with. He looks back at Daisy who looks at him longingly. He quickly puts the sandwich back in his pocket.

MAYANNE  
This is my son, Louis. Look at him.

MAN  
Fine boy you got there, Mayanne.

Louis looks back at Daisy. People walk around her as if she is invisible. She also looks for Louis through the crowd.

MAYANNE  
He plays the horn like you never heard too. I'm telling you. Louis, you got to show them.

LOUIS  
I didn't bring my pipe with me tonight.

MAYANNE  
He's working here now; Ponce himself gave him a gig.

FRIEND  
That is something, Mayanne.

MAYANNE  
(To Louis) You drunk yet?

Mayanne goes of to dance with the man who holds her up properly. Louis looks worried.

FRIEND

Don't you worry, your mama can hold her liquor.

EXT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Louis holds up Mayanne while Ponce holds the door for them.

PONCE

She sure showed you, didn't she?

MAYANNE

I sure did. Boy's got to be able to hold his liquor like his mama.

PONCE

You get home safely now. Louis, you playing this Wednesday night?

Louis nods.

LOUIS

Thanks, Mr. Ponce.

Daisy leans against a light pole outside. Louis sees her. He directs Mayanne towards her and discretely hands the sandwich in his pocket to her. He walks away but turns around to see Daisy walking away with a MAN.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - NIGHT

Louis tucks his mother in bed. He watches her for a moment.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I'll never forget how Mayanne showed me how to hold my liquor. That's one of them lessons in life that stays with you. And I could not forget that little, hungry pixie either.

INT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Louis finishes his solo. The DANCERS on the packed floor finish and clap. Isaac whispers to IRENE, 20, pointing to Louis.

ISAAC

You want to work for him? I can arrange it.

IRENE

I know I don't want to work for the likes of you.

ISAAC

Now, sweetie, I got me a girl already. I'm just trying to help out a friend. Why you want to treat me like that? Here he comes. Let me break it to him first.

He pats her away. Louis weaves through the crowd. Isaac waves him over.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Louis, my man, I have some good news for you. You know all the musicians got girls working for them.

LOUIS

Yeah, I know.

ISAAC

See that Jane over there. She's pretty. Oh come on. I know you'll like her. What's not to like?

LOUIS

How do you know?

ISAAC

Cause here she comes right over here.

Louis turns to see Irene smiling at him.

LOUIS

(To Isaac) She's pretty, but no.

ISAAC

Irene, this is Louis, I been telling you about.

IRENE

I can see that. How you doing, sweetie?

She gives Isaac a look to scram.

ISAAC

Louis, Irene will take good care of you. I'll let the two of you negotiate this. Unless you want me to do that for you.

LOUIS

Yes, I'm not sure what I'm negotiating.

IRENE

Don't you go getting any ideas about trying the merchandise, either of you. You just my protection case I need it and you help send fellows over.

LOUIS

Oh, that's what I do. I can do that.

ISAAC

I know what to do.

IRENE

You shut up. You don't know nothing.

LOUIS

He really rubbed you the wrong way.

IRENE

But you not going to do that, are you honey.

ISAAC

No, he's not. And with his help, you can make some heavy sugar.

MONTAGE

Louis plays with the band while Irene dances with various GUYS.

Louis directs a GUY to Irene.

She goes into a back room with the guy.

Irene hands Louis money. Louis plays a solo. Irene dances with a GUY. Irene hands Louis money.

LOUIS (V.O.)

So, I got me a girl working for me. Seems Isaac was right, everyone had a girl at that time. Musicians made a little extra, and the girls had their claim on the shows.

END MONTAGE

In the middle of Louis's song he sees Daisy sitting on a stool watching him. He smiles back. A few notes later he ends the song and hops off the stage. The band continues playing. He walks over to Daisy. Irene, dancing with a GUY, surveys the woman who has captured Louis's attention.

LOUIS

Hi, Daisy.

Daisy turns her cheek, and Louis kisses it.

DAISY

Hi there, Louis. You sure can play that thing.

LOUIS

You got a guy?

A GUY throws a bottle and almost hits the BARTENDER before crashing on the floor. Daisy looks around uncomfortably. A few other GUYS throw the guy out.

DAISY

Boy, you don't mess around. I work for Cheeky Black.

LOUIS

Why do you work for him? He's always on the edge, and he thinks he's a real egg. Now I know why he's always in them glad rags; he don't even leave you enough to eat on.

DAISY

That might be true, but if I had a real man, I'd cut him loose.

Irene grabs Louis's arm and pulls him away.

IRENE

Louis, I want you to meet a friend of mine.

Louis turns to see Daisy accepting a dance from another GUY. Irene pulls him close to dance.

IRENE (CONT'D)

When you going to try out the merchandise you been selling?

LOUIS

I will. I promise.

He looks up at the stage of musicians.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

I have to go back to play my part in this number.

IRENE

That's right, my man. That's where you belong.

As Louis disappears into the crowd.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Not dancing with that ho.

When Louis passes Daisy sitting on a stool again. He hands her a sandwich in his pocket.

LOUIS

You come by every night if you want to.  
I'll make sure I have a sandwich for you.

She takes the sandwich and begins hungrily eating.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I didn't care if I'd be hungry later, I couldn't stand to see that poor girl starving.

EXT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Irene hands Louis some cash. He helps her put her coat on.

IRENE

Louis, why don't you walk me home?

She seductively whispers in his ear and caresses him.

IRENE (CONT'D)

I think it's time.

LOUIS

Irene, I'm tired tonight, but I will walk you home.

They walk down the street that is settling in for the night. A BARTENDER pours a pail of dirty water onto the curb. A MAN stumbles around them.

IRENE

Watch it, you zozzled-eyed fool.

She grabs Louis's arm. He holds his case close.

LOUIS

Butt me.

She lights a cigarette and hands him one and lights one for herself.

IRENE

You going to have a big time with me tonight.

LOUIS

You've already had a big time.

IRENE

But not with you. What, you don't like me? I'm not good enough for you?

LOUIS

No, that's not it.

IRENE

I'm not skinny enough for you?

LOUIS

No, you're the right kind of girl, a real piece of cake if you ask me.

IRENE

I saw you talking to that woman, Daisy.

LOUIS

It was nothing.

IRENE

You better come home with me if you know what's good for you.

LOUIS

Look, Irene, we're business partners.

IRENE

I never had no business partner that didn't want to try out what he was selling.

LOUIS

Irene, what's eating you?

IRENE

You think I'm not good enough for you.

LOUIS

Let's get you home. I'll bet you're just dead tired. I know I am.



She turns and grabs him, hysterical.

IRENE

You take me home, Louis, you take me home  
and you have me, all of me. You think  
I'm not good enough for you?

Louis tries to push her away, but she holds on too tight.

LOUIS

Irene, stop this.

He pushes her away. As she loses her grasp on him, she  
stumbles back into a puddle and falls. Louis holds back  
a laugh and reaches a hand to pull her up. As he does,  
she screams and lunges at him with a switch blade,  
stabbing him in the shoulder. He pushes her away.

IRENE

Ain't no body going to make a fool out of  
me. Do you hear me. Ain't no body. I  
ain't no body's chunk of lead.

Louis stumbles back holding his shoulder.

LOUIS

I never said that. I never did.

He steps away from her. She shoos him away.

IRENE

Go chase yourself now.

Louis stumbles away, trying to run.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - NIGHT

Mayanne helps Louis take his jacket off. Mama Lucy  
almost faints as she sees the blood all over the jacket  
and now gushing out of the wound. Louis's fades, his  
head dropping to the table.

MAYANNE

I'm ask you again, what alley cat did  
this to you?

Louis shakes his head. She begins wrapping a towel  
around his shoulder and pressing.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)

You tell me or so help me god.

MAMA LUCY  
Tell her, Louis. Tell her!

MAYANNE  
And don't you give me no line.

LOUIS  
Irene.

MAYANNE  
That's what I thought; that girl been  
working for you?

LOUIS  
How'd you know?

MAYANNE  
I got my ways. Mama Lucy, come here.  
Hold this down hard as you can.

She tears a piece of cloth and wraps it around the towel  
to keep it in place.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
I'll be back. Help me put him in the bed.

They both help Louis stand, Mayanne under one arm and  
Mama Lucy guiding. Louis moans.

LOUIS  
Mayanne, don't go after her.

MAYANNE  
Don't you go telling your mama what to do  
and what not to do. I'm your mama, and  
ain't no whore going to do this to my  
baby.

She slams the door.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Through the darkness and flickering street lights, Black  
Benny sees Mayanne, fist clenched, stomping down the  
street with a determined stride like a bull.

BLACK BENNY  
(To himself) Oh shit! Now she's done it.

He follows a safe distance behind.

EXT. IRENE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mayanne pounds on the door.

MAYANNE

Open up!

Irene opens the door, drunk with a bottle in hand.

IRENE

What you want crazy bitch?

MAYANNE

You know who I am?

IRENE

Yeah, I know you, Mayanne.

INT. IRENE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mayanne jumps on her, grabbing her neck, knocking her down, strangling Irene and banging her head on the floor.

MAYANNE

You never will forget me now.

Black Benny rushes in and tries to pull Mayanne off of Irene.

BLACK BENNY

You'll kill her. Let go, Mayanne. Let go!

He manages to get her to stop. Irene holds her head and neck crying. Black Benny continues to pull Mayanne out the door.

BLACK BENNY (CONT'D)

Come on, Mayanne, come on now.

MAYANNE

You ever go anywhere near my son, I will kill you next time.

She slams the door.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - NIGHT

Louis sits at the table eating a giant bowl of pasta. One shoulder is noticeably bigger under his suit jacket. Mayanne picks up his plate to drop another giant helping of sauce in the bowl.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
I never did see Irene again. My mama,  
Mayanne, was pretty convincing I've been  
told.

Louis finishes, grabs his horn and goes for the door.

MAYANNE  
You be careful with that arm. It's not  
healed proper.

LOUIS  
I will.

MAYANNE  
And come straight home after.

LOUIS  
I'm playing with Papa Joe.

He quickly exits. She shakes her head in defeat and  
continues washing blood out of his shirt in the sink.

INT. MUSIC HALL - NIGHT

Louis and Oliver play a duet together. Louis notices  
Daisy sitting at a table with a MAN. As the song ends,  
the AUDIENCE CLAPS and the man leaves Daisy alone.

Louis walks over to her table.

LOUIS  
This is a fancy place for a girl who  
can't buy dinner.

DAISY  
I'm not paying for your dinner.

LOUIS  
Yeah, that would be a lot.

He rubs his belly.

DAISY  
I can see that.

He sits down.

LOUIS  
You alone?

DAISY  
I was working earlier, been entertaining,  
kind of like you.

LOUIS  
Really?

He rubs his shoulder.

DAISY  
You hurting?

LOUIS  
Happened a few days ago. I think Mayanne  
fixed me good as new. But I might need a  
little bit more fixing.

INT. DAISY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

In one room with just a bed, Daisy lifts her dress up and over her head revealing pads she wears on her sides. She tosses the dress to Louis, who sits on the bed watching. He catches the dress, uncertain, looking at the pads on her body.

DAISY  
I wear these sides.

She pats the pad on her rear and removes it.

DAISY (CONT'D)  
To make me look meatier.

She leans over to kiss Louis. He contentedly responds.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - DAY

Mayanne removes the bandages from Louis's shoulder.

LOUIS  
Ouch.

MAYANNE  
This is what happens when you don't come  
home.

LOUIS  
Mayanne?

MAYANNE  
Ah hum.

LOUIS  
I been invited by Papa Joe himself to  
play on the river boats with him.

MAYANNE  
Good, that might keep you out of trouble  
with the law and the women.

EXT. RIVERBOAT DOCK - MORNING

Before boarding the riverboat docked near-by, carrying a  
small suitcase and his horn, Louis kisses Daisy.

LOUIS  
Promise me, Daisy, promise me that you'll  
stay away from Cheeky Black while I'm  
gone.

DAISY  
I will Louis. I promise.

He boards the boat, skipping along.

MONTAGE

Louis and Oliver play a duo. WHITE PATRONS dance. A  
PHOTOGRAPHER shoots photos of the BAND. Louis and Oliver  
play another duo.

END MONTAGE

EXT. DOCK - DAY

Oliver hands Louis an envelope. The other MUSICIANS  
wave.

MUSICIAN  
Good job, Little Louis.

OLIVER  
Stick with me. You got a future ahead of  
you, kid.

LOUIS  
I didn't tell you, Uncle Joe, I got me a  
girl.

OLIVER  
You do huh? Well that's good. I'm glad  
to hear it.

Louis almost skips with joy down the street.

LOUIS  
Thanks Uncle Joe, I can't wait to see  
her. She's a real piece of cake.

OLIVER  
Look out, dames, Little Louis is in the  
game.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis stops next to a WOMAN pruning a rose bush.

LOUIS  
Lady, can I buy a few of those flowers  
from you?

WOMAN  
You got a girl?

LOUIS  
Yes ma'am.

EXT. DAISY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Louis drops his small suitcase down and energetically  
knocks. Nothing. He knocks again. He hears VOICES, a  
woman and a man.

CHEEKY BLACK (O.S.)  
Who the hell is that?

Daisy opens the door. Louis looks from her to CHEEKY  
BLACK, a large imposing man, then secures his hat, grabs  
his suitcase and runs as fast as he can.

Behind him the door SLAMS, and SLAPS and YELLING are  
heard.

CHEEKY BLACK (O.S.)  
(CONT'D)  
I'll show you, you bitch.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis runs so fast he almost runs into Josephine. She  
grabs him.

JOSEPHINE  
You're home?

LOUIS

Yes ma'am.

JOSEPHINE

Did you buy those flowers for your mama  
or for some special lady?

LOUIS

I bought them for a special lady,  
Grandma, I bought them for you.

He hands her the flowers. She hugs him.

JOSEPHINE

You always been my sweet boy.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I thought for sure that was the end of me  
and Daisy.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis, Isaac, Black Benny and FRIENDS hang on the street  
passing a giant bucket-sized mug of beer between them.

LOUIS

Anyone going to pass that to me?

FRIEND

Oh no, Black Benny's got it now. That  
means there will be none for none of us.

ISAAC

Hey, save some for satchel mouth.

He playfully punches Louis.

Daisy dressed in her finest turns the corner.

LOUIS (V.O.)

One month later...

ISAAC

Heads or tails?

Isaac flips a coin.

LOUIS

Tails.

ISAAC

Heads that's your old lady walking down  
the street.



All the guys turn, some WHISTLE. Louis looks down and tries to cover his face.

LOUIS  
I'm done with her.

ISAAC  
I can't believe I'm saying this Louis,  
but if you're done, then I guess you  
won't mind if I go over there and try a  
piece of that cake.

Louis punches him in the arm.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Ouch. I guess that's a no.

Daisy stands a comfortable distance from them eyeing Louis. Louis goes over to her.

LOUIS  
Daisy.

DAISY  
Hey, Louis.

They casually walk down the street.

LOUIS  
I'm sorry I ran. I didn't know what else  
to do.

DAISY  
You did the right thing, honey.

LOUIS  
He didn't hurt you?

DAISY  
I'm all right.

LOUIS  
Why did you go back to him?

DAISY  
I didn't know what else to do. I tried.  
I did, Louis.

LOUIS  
Yeah, it's not easy to get away from  
gangsters like him, I guess. You should  
stay away from him. He's not good for  
you.

They walk on quietly. Louis slips his hand around her hand.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Did you get all dolled-up for me?

DAISY  
What you think?

She kisses him.

DAISY (CONT'D)  
Oh, Louis, I missed you. I missed you so much.

LOUIS  
I missed you too, Daisy.

They continue walking.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
We can't have that happen again.

DAISY  
What you mean, me missing you?

LOUIS  
No, you falling for Cheeky Black's lines again.

DAISY  
I won't. Louis?

She points to a giant war propaganda sign with an image of a soldier and text, "As American as apple pie, mom and baseball!" Next to that sign is another sign above a pawn shop, "Wedding rings, wedding gowns, ties, suits, all your wedding needs in one stop."

DAISY (CONT'D)  
What's that sign mean?

LOUIS  
It means let's get married so he can't bother you no more.

They look into the shop. A tuba is in the window, where his first cornet used to be.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
I knew that would be one thing Mayanne would not like, that she could not read.  
(MORE)

LOUIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
It seems Daisy's parents spoiled her,  
letting her run around the farm, never  
going to school.

INT. PAWNSHOP - DAY

Louis buys cheap rings from Mr. Babin. Both happily  
looking at the wares in the shop.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

In front of a JUDGE, the happy couple kiss. Louis shows  
Daisy where to sign.

EXT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

Black Benny is on his way into the courthouse when he  
spots Louis walking arm-in-arm with Daisy.

BLACK BENNY  
(To himself) Now he went and done it.

Louis and Daisy smile and laugh.

LOUIS  
Daisy, you're not wearing your sides.

DAISY  
I'm not trying to impress nobody but you,  
and you already know I don't have no  
sides.

INT. MOTEL - EVENING

The ATTENDANT, big boxer guy, hands Louis a set of keys.

ATTENDANT  
One week, got you for one week.

He looks at Daisy.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)  
Let me know if you need more time than  
that. And congratulations.

LOUIS  
Thank you.

Louis takes the key and picks up a small suitcase and almost trips on the stairs in his excitement prompting a CHUCKLE from Daisy.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Louis opens the door and drops the suitcase on the floor in a small room with a double bed taking up most of it.

LOUIS  
Not so bad.

DAISY  
Louis, this is fine.

She plops on the bed.

LOUIS  
This is our first home together.

She pulls his shirt pulling him closer.

DAISY  
Louis, this just the honeymoon.

LOUIS  
Oh, yeah.

She kisses him.

DAISY  
Louis, I don't want you leaving me no more. I want you with me always.

Louis looks up with a shock.

LOUIS  
I have to tell Mayanne.

DAISY  
I'll go with you.

LOUIS  
I think I better do this one alone.

She hugs him.

DAISY  
I'm holding you tight.

LOUIS  
But first things first.

He slams the door with his free foot.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - MORNING

Mayanne pours Louis a cup of coffee. She sits down and sips her coffee casually.

MAYANNE

So you went and got yourself married?

LOUIS (V.O.)

Of course, she'd already gotten wind of the marriage.

MAYANNE

Do you love her?

LOUIS

Yes, I do.

MAYANNE

Bring her around so I can take a look at her.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Louis and Daisy, carrying suitcases, make their way to the bottom of a staircase leading up to a balcony. Some railing is torn away at the top. The house is large and worn and in need of repair. Louis shakes the railing.

LOUIS

It'll do just fine. Just be careful not to go too close to the edge.

He pretends to fall off the edge.

DAISY

Louis, stop that. You'll fall off.

He grabs her arm as they rush up the stairs.

LOUIS

You'll make sure I don't fall off.

He takes a key out of his pocket and opens a door. The door CREAKS, revealing a small room covered in cobwebs that shimmer in the light.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Louis sets a few suitcases on the dusty floor. Daisy pats a dusty chair. He wipes his finger on a small breakfast table.

DAISY

I can clean it up. I'll make it nice.  
You'll see.

Louis kisses her on the cheek.

LOUIS

I know you will, sugar.

DAISY

Oh, Louis, I just can't believe I found  
me a guy like you. I love you, I do.

LOUIS

I love you too.

He pushes her on the bed, and dust flies up all over both of them. Both LAUGH and COUGH.

DAISY

I guess we better clean this mess up,  
fore we commence to making this place  
ours.

LOUIS

Say it ain't so.

Dust flies up in the air again as they fall back onto the bed.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis and Daisy walk together holding hands talking.

DAISY

How long I have to take care of him? Why  
can't the father's family take him?

LOUIS

Some white man's been getting lots a  
women pregnant.

DAISY

You mean just running around making  
babies like it ain't no body's business?

LOUIS  
Yeah, something like that.

DAISY  
How did your cousin get mixed up with him?

LOUIS  
Same as all the others, I guess. She might have been cleaning his house.

DAISY  
Poor thing.

DAISY (CONT'D)  
I still don't see why I got to do it?

LOUIS  
Daisy, he's part of our family.

DAISY  
What about Mama Lucy?

LOUIS  
You know Mama Lucy works cleaning houses too.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - DAY

Mayanne gives CLARENCE, 2, dressed in a little baby suit, a cookie. He smiles. Louis and Daisy watch.

MAYANNE  
He's a sweet child, but he likes to climb and run around, so you have to watch him.

Daisy just shakes her head confused.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
My cousin Clara died in child birth, and my mama had been taking care of Clarence, her baby boy, but now she needed some help.

Mayanne hands a small bag stuffed with baby items to Louis and then tries to get Clarence to take Daisy's hand.

DAISY  
He's sticky.

MAYANNE

He's two. He's supposed to be sticky.  
Life is messy.

Louis notices how inept Daisy seems with handling  
Clarence. She holds him far away as if he has a disease.

LOUIS

Daisy, I'll carry him.

Mayanne shakes her head, giving Louis a knowing look,  
which he returns with a smile.

LOUIS (V.O.)

For a while, you might say, me, Daisy and  
Clarence had a life together.

MONTAGE

INT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Louis plays a gig.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - VARIOUS TIMES

Daisy cleans, making their home nice. Daisy hangs a sheet  
as a curtain. Clarence plays with a rag doll. Louis  
arrives home to Daisy's open arms with Clarence tugging  
at him. Louis picking up Clarence. All of them dancing.  
Louis spoons food for Clarence. Laughter.

INT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Louis finishing a song.

END MONTAGE

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Daisy wearing an apron and looking very matronly, places  
Clarence on a mat with his doll. She shakes a big sheet  
out and drapes it over the small kitchen table. She  
moves the sheet until it seems to fit perfectly. She  
then places two candles on the table and is pleased.

Clarence is playing and watching her move about.

She stirs a pot on the stove, then carefully places two  
bowls on the table.



She pours herself a drink, lights the candles and then lights a cigarette.

EXT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

She walks out to the balcony to look up at the full-moon. Clarence follows her holding out his doll.

DAISY

Clarence, why you got to always be following me around. Can't you just sit there like a good baby and play?

Clarence just smiles up at her.

INT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Louis and the BAND PLAY while COUPLES dance and swirl around the room. Louis finishes playing the tune. Isaac motions for him to take a break and join him. Louis ignores him, but Isaac is persistent and finally panicked. Louis puts his horn down and joins Isaac. The band continues playing.

LOUIS

Is Daisy okay?

ISAAC

I'm not talking about no Daisy, old man. King Oliver's second horn pulled a Daniel Boone, sick as a dog and all hell broke loose. Joe wants you to finish the show.

Louis immediately goes to the stage to whisper this to one of the guys in the band.

INT. MUSIC HALL - NIGHT

Isaac and Louis weave through the crowd up to the stage, where the BAND PLAYS. A member motions for Louis to join them. As he approaches the stage, Louis begins playing with dramatic flair.

Couples dance. Isaac sips a drink. Louis plays a solo.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The Candles are now limp over a pool of wax dripping on the table. Daisy sits looking forlorn. Clarence, still in his day cloths, lies on a cot sleeping.

She looks over at him and takes another drag of a cigarette. She makes a fist and holds back the sound that might escape by going back on the balcony.

INT. MUSIC HALL - NIGHT

Louis finishes a more improved improvisational solo . The crowd cheers. Morris waves and claps. He whispers to his FRIEND.

MORRIS

You know, he used to work for me when he was a kid? Man, that kid's got a future. I knew when I first heard him.

Joe Oliver walks past Morris.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

King. Your guy? He's okay?

OLIVER

Oh yeah. Little Louis, he's good.

MORRIS

Yeah, can you believe?

Louis joins Oliver and Morris.

OLIVER

Louis, man you knocked it out of the park.

LOUIS

Thanks, Uncle Joe. And Mr. Morris how you been?

MORRIS

We're all well, Louis. And you, you're on the trolley now kid. How's Daisy?

Louis is suddenly shocked by this question.

LOUIS

Oh no, I'm late. I have to go, Papa Joe. I'm glad you're back.

Louis tries to escape but Oliver stops him.

OLIVER

Not so fast, lover boy.

LOUIS

I promised Daisy I'd be home early. She said...

OLIVER

She'll be all right. Listen, don't stress yourself out over women, they go up and down sometimes. Listen, I'm going to Chicago, I had to meet with some fellows tonight. That's why I sent for you. I'm going to send for you when I get settled in Chicago and need a second horn.

Suddenly more calm.

LOUIS

Papa Joe, I hope that's soon.

EXT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Louis softly whistles up the steps then stops when he sees the door open and a demonic looking shadow on the wall created by a flickering candle light and a larger than life Daisy smoking.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Louis steps into the room. The table is still set perfectly. Daisy doesn't look up; she just smokes. She pours another shot into the glass next to her. Louis realizes this is trouble.

LOUIS

Where's Clarence?

DAISY

Is that all you can think about is Clarence?

LOUIS

Daisy, I can explain.

She picks up a plate menacingly.

DAISY

Well you better start explaining.

LOUIS

I got called by Papa Joe to play his set.

DAISY  
What, you now his boy? All y'all the  
same. I know what you doing.

She stomps over to him like she's carrying an ax not a  
plate.

LOUIS  
No, Daisy.

She throws the plate at him. He dodges it.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Daisy, that was close.

DAISY  
Not close enough.

She grabs another plate. Clarence wakes up and rubs his  
eyes.

LOUIS  
Daisy, you don't want to hurt me or  
anyone. Now come on.

DAISY  
I don't want you playing music if you  
can't come home on time.

LOUIS  
Now, you know I can't do that. How will  
I make money?

DAISY  
You can work on the coal wagon like the  
rest of them and ride the wagon like you  
used to do.

LOUIS  
Now come on.

Clarence has toddled out to the balcony behind them.

Daisy punches Louis in the face when he turns to see  
Clarence on the balcony. He grabs her hands.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Daisy, you can't be hitting me in the  
chops. Woman.

They hear a loud CRACK and THUMP and eerie QUIET then  
Clarence SCREAMING.

EXT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Louis runs to him. Clarence's head is bleeding. He picks him up. Daisy staggers down.

DAISY

Damn kid.

LOUIS

Daisy! He's bleeding. He's hurt. I guess you had your tea now? I'm taking him to the hospital.

Louis gently scoops Clarence into his arms and carries him down the street. In a desperate attempt, he wraps a handkerchief on Clarence's head to stop the bleeding.

Daisy stumbles on the steps and sits watching Louis leave.

DAISY

He did this to himself. Why he couldn't listen when I tell him to be home?

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A white DOCTOR directs Louis to a gurney with a bandaged and sleeping Clarence.

DOCTOR

I need to tell you. There's a possibility that he may not develop normally because of this fall.

Louis is shocked.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

He has sustained a serious skull fracture. And there's some swelling. You'll have to watch him. You understand?

LOUIS

You mean he might be slow?

DOCTOR

Yes.

LOUIS

Thank you for helping us.

He looks at Clarence.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Poor little guy.

Louis slides back into his chair as if he feels faint.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
He liked to climb, never bothered no  
body. He's a good kid.

DOCTOR  
He's going to be alright. He may just  
need a little help.

LOUIS  
And I will make sure he gets it. Don't  
you worry doctor. I'm sorry.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT

The Louis (of 1945) watches the scene from the doorway in deep thought. Louis sets Clarence down on the cot to sleep. He pulls up a chair to sit. Daisy is curled into a ball in the bed. As she turns her tearful face towards Louis, he turns and covers his eyes holding back his own grief. She slowly goes to him.

DAISY  
Is he going be alright?

LOUIS  
Yeah, he's going to be alright, except  
the doctor said he might be a little  
slow. If the worlds not hard enough, he  
has that shit too.

DAISY  
It's all my fault.

She's crying uncontrollably.

LOUIS  
No, Daisy, it's my fault.

DAISY  
No you said it, you said it was my fault  
fore you left.

LOUIS  
Daisy, let's not fight.

He slides his hand in hers.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
You're my wife, we have to get along now.  
Right?

She goes back to mumbling.

DAISY  
I'm sorry, Louis. I'm sorry.

She curls up in bed. He neatly places covers over her.

LOUIS  
Go to sleep now. You're just tired.

DAISY  
You're not coming to bed. You don't want  
to sleep with me no more?

LOUIS  
No, Daisy, I have to stay awake. The  
doctor said to keep an eye on Clarence  
while he sleeps. Make sure he's alright.  
Just for tonight.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
Uncle Joe was right. Some women can be up  
and down. I never knew what or who I was  
going to get when I got home.

MONTAGE

Louis and Daisy argue. Daisy kisses Louis when he comes  
home. Clarence cries in the corner. Daisy throws a pan at  
Louis. Louis comforts Clarence. Daisy gives Louis a cup  
of coffee in the morning.

DAISY  
Louis, if you can just come home on time,  
I can be nice, and we can stop all this  
fussing.

Louis looks at her unsure what to say.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The three of them walk hand-in-hand down the street,  
laughing and swinging arms.

END MONTAGE

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Louis puts his performing suit and sits to tie his shoes.  
Daisy walks in wearing her finest dress with her hair  
done perfect and earrings.

LOUIS

Look at you. You look like the cat's  
meow.

DAISY

Thank you, sugar.

LOUIS

Where you going?

Daisy turns on him.

DAISY

You didn't forget?

LOUIS

What's the trouble?

DAISY

Trouble? You haven't seen trouble.

LOUIS

Oh, I've seen trouble.

DAISY

Tell me you didn't forget. You're  
bringing me to a picture show. You  
promised.

LOUIS

What about Clarence?

DAISY

He's at your mother's house. I done took  
him myself.

She begins to cry.

LOUIS

Daisy, please. Honey, I have to work. I  
can't cancel a gig. You understand? Why  
don't you come and hear me play tonight?  
Look, you're going to mess up all that  
pretty face you put on.

DAISY

No, you go. I'll stay here and cry like I  
always do.



Louis picks up his horn to leave.

LOUIS  
I'd really like you to come. I think it  
would be good for you to have a big time  
like we used to do.

She doesn't move. He closes the door. She picks up her  
purse to follow him.

EXT. STREET - DAY

They walk arm-in-arm.

DAISY  
Louis, I'm a forgive you just this once.  
You know why?

LOUIS  
No, sweetie, why?

DAISY  
Cause I love you.

INT. HENRY'S BAR - NIGHT

Louis plays trumpet with the BAND. Daisy dances with a  
guy and looks up at Louis.

Later Isaac whispers in Louis's ear.

EXT. JOE'S GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Joe is neatly placing apples on a stand when Louis  
arrives.

LOUIS  
Mr. Joe.

GROCER JOE  
Louis.

He wipes hands then pats Louis on the back.

GROCER JOE (CONT'D)  
Good to see you, kid. Listen, I got a  
message for you.

LOUIS  
Isaac told me to come by, you wanted to  
tell me yourself.

INT. JOE'S GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Joe fills a bag with bread and red beans and rice.

GROCER JOE

Yeah, If it was anyone else, I wouldn't be giving you this message. But you got a shot at something. Oliver wants you to catch the 10:30 train this Friday for Chicago. He said he's got three months of gigs lined up for you.

Louis's head is spinning. Joe hands him the bag.

GROCER JOE (CONT'D)

Take this to your mama.

Louis reaches in his pocket to pay.

GROCER JOE (CONT'D)

Take it; a going away present. You're going, right?

LOUIS

Yeah. Yeah. Thanks.

He takes the bag.

GROCER JOE

Oliver's calling back today. I almost forgot.

He reaches in his pocket and hands Louis an envelope. Louis opens it and pulls out a picture of LIL HARDING, 24, sophisticated, with her leg peeking through a slit in her skirt as she poses at a piano. He puts the envelope in his back pocket.

LOUIS

Tell him I'll be there.

GROCER JOE

Don't miss that train, Louis.

LOUIS

No, no sir.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis walks in a daze, noticing things. The Pie Man goes by.

PIE MAN  
(Singing) Pies, pies for everyone, get  
your hot, sweet, pies, pies in the skies,  
a sun of pies, pies for everyone...

Mr. Babin wipes the window at the pawn shop. Louis takes  
in the sights as if he's saying good-bye to the city.

INT. MAYANNE'S HOME - MORNING

Mayanne and Louis sit sipping coffee and eating biscuits  
and gravy.

MAYANNE  
Son, this is what you've always dreamed  
of.

LOUIS  
I know, but how am I going to tell Daisy?

MAYANNE  
All I know is that you were excited until  
you started talking about Daisy.

LOUIS  
Yeah.

MAYANNE  
She hasn't turned out too good huh?

LOUIS  
I can't say that.

MAYANNE  
I knew from the day you were born that  
something big was going to happen to you.  
I just didn't know what it was. I guess  
I tried to protect you.

She picks up the dishes.

MAYANNE (CONT'D)  
They have some pretty bad ass gangsters  
in Chicago. You stay clear of that kind  
of mess.

LOUIS  
Yes ma'am.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Louis cautiously enters. Smoke rises from the stove.  
Daisy flips a pork chop in a pan.

LOUIS (V.O.)  
Poor Daisy, she never could make food  
taste like Mayanne.

DAISY  
Sit yourself down, I made you some lunch.

He sits next to Clarence, who is already finishing  
nibbling on a bone. She places a crispy pork chop on  
Louis's plate and spoons some greens next to them.

LOUIS  
This looks good, Daisy.

DAISY  
I'm sorry I burnt the chops.

LOUIS  
That's alright. Clarence here likes  
them. Don't you Clarence?

Clarence nods, focused on the task of getting every  
morsal of the bone.

DAISY  
So how is Mayanne this morning?

LOUIS  
She's fine.

DAISY  
What's wrong? Cat got your tongue?  
That's not like you Louis, not wanting to  
talk. Something's eating you, and it's  
not my pork chops.

LOUIS  
No, Daisy, it's not. They're fine. Sit  
down.

DAISY  
Oh no.

LOUIS  
I got some good news and some bad news.  
I got a message from King Oliver to meet  
him in Chicago to play for the big time.  
The bad news is I have to leave for three  
months of gigs.

She starts cleaning up.

DAISY

That's alright. I'll be fine.

LOUIS

I'll send money and letters. Mayanne can read them for you. And she said she'd take Clarence while I'm gone.

DAISY

Yes, I'll be fine. When?

LOUIS

In a few days.

She is shaking now and sits down.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Daisy, this is good news.

DAISY

I know, I'm just afraid you going go to that big city and find some big time city girl.

Louis helps her clean up. They hug.

LOUIS (V.O.)

I thought Daisy was going to blow a gasket over me leaving, but I think she knew, there was no point in any more fussing.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Mayanne, Isaac, Mama Lucy, Clarence and Isaac stand at the platform next to the train. PASSENGERS walk around them and board the train.

Black Benny walks with Louis up to the platform. Daisy walks a few feet behind them.

BLACK BENNY

You find yourself a good white man, who'll put his hand on your shoulder and say, "That's my nigger." Then you going be good.

He pats him on the shoulder. Daisy kisses Louis.

DAISY

I'll be here. I ain't going no where's.

MAMA LUCY  
(To Louis) Try to stay out of trouble.

Louis shakes Isaac's hand.

LOUIS  
Try not to take too much care of things.

Isaac hugs him.

ISAAC  
Oh man.

Mayanne gives him a big hug. Louis steps on to the train waving good-bye.

MAYANNE  
Make your mama proud.

Daisy wipes away tears.

LOUIS  
(To Daisy) I'll send letters and money.  
Go to Mayanne's to get her to read them  
for you.

Daisy waves. Louis disappears into the train.

INT. BACK STAGE - DAY

Louis carries his suitcases down a hallway. LIL, 23, well dressed, determined walks by. Louis recognizes her from the photo.

LOUIS  
Hey.

She turns.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Can you tell me where the band is  
rehearsing?

She looks at his bags.

LIL  
Do I look like I carry bags.

Another band member, JIM, 27, a clean-cut guy interjects.

JIM  
It's this way. Follow me.

Lil stops before going into the ladies room watching Louis in his big soled shoes, CLUNKING along the hall. She shakes her head before closing the door.

LOUIS  
What's eating her?

JIM  
Her, that's the Lil Harding, college graduate, thinks she's better than everyone.

LOUIS  
Is that so? Still she's pretty tight.

JIM  
Don't take that trip for biscuits.

INT. SHOW HALL - NIGHT

A WHITE AUDIENCE sits, dances and CLAPS in a large, fancy room with ornate lamps and decorated tables, WAITERS pour champagne and serve food from silver trays.

The BAND begins another song. Oliver stands center stage. Louis begins his section, clearly going off-book, because, Oliver looks over to him, but Louis's eyes are closed. He only looks up to see Lil now looking at him. He finishes. This was clearly his way of saying "Take that," to Lil.

A few MAFIA GUYS sitting at a table notice Louis and comment amongst themselves.

INT. BACK STAGE - NIGHT

Oliver stops Louis in the hall.

OLIVER  
Little Louis, what happened with the first part.

LOUIS  
Sorry Uncle Joe, I had to improvise a bit. Won't happen again. I'll remember my part.

MONTAGE

INT. SHOW HALL - NIGHT

Louis plays a short solo. PATRONS dance. Oliver plays his part. Louis plays small parts behind Joe. No one notices Louis anymore.

LOUIS (V.O.)

Uncle Joe kept giving me shorter and shorter solos and parts, I thought I must be playing badly. I wrote Mayanne and Daisy that I might be coming home sooner.

END MONTAGE

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Louis, Oliver and the band prepare to begin a recording. An ENGINEER sets levels and adjust the microphones.

ENGINEER

Okay, give me a little sound. Let's see what we've got.

The band begins to play the song. Louis is clearly louder with clearer tone than Oliver.

OLIVER

Wait. Hold on.

The band stops. Oliver guides Louis to the back corner of the room. Louis looks disappointed.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Okay, let's try this thing again.

They play. Louis is still loud but not in the microphone. The Engineer gives Oliver the thumbs up. Lil plays her part while watching Louis play his.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Lil puts on lipstick and fluffs her hair. Then dusts some powder on her face. She examines herself in the mirror and smooths her skirt. She hears Louis's CLUNKY shoes in the hallway and opens the door.

LIL

Hey there, Louis.

LOUIS

Hey, Lil.



He keeps walking. She follows.

LIL

Louis, don't feel blue about the recording.

LOUIS

I had to play in the corner. I might as well just pack it in.

LIL

No, I've got a better idea. Why don't you join me at one of Chicago's cool cat joints.

LOUIS

I thought you were all high and mighty and educated and all.

LIL

You got one of those right.

LOUIS

Which one?

LIL

All.

INT. CHICAGO BAR - NIGHT

Everything is red; Louis and Lil sit sipping their cocktails listening to a jazz PIANIST. A few PATRONS move about in the late night hours, grabbing coats, sipping drinks, tapping their fingers.

LIL

Look, Louis, Oliver put you in the back because you play so well.

LOUIS

He told me just the other day that I still need some more lessons.

Lil laughs at this.

LIL

He's just jealous if you want to know the truth. It's true.

LOUIS

Lil, I think you're pretty swell, as you Chicago folks say, but I don't believe a word of it.

LIL  
How long have you been here?

LOUIS  
You mean in Chicago playing with Uncle Joe?

LIL  
Yeah.

LOUIS  
Coming on four months.

LIL  
I think it's about time.

She takes his hand and leads him away. He smiles a knowing smile.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Daisy places an unopened letter in a drawer and closes it.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Jim tunes his base. Louis polishes his trumpet. Daisy dabs powder on her face.

JIM  
I'm telling you, it's true. He's keeping some of our take.

LIL  
I told you, Louis.

LOUIS  
Uncle Joe wouldn't do that. And if he did maybe he deserves it. He got us all this gig.

JIM  
Don't go telling him I told you. I don't want to end up in the can.

LOUIS  
Hey lighten up, man.

INT. OLIVER'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Oliver hides a gun in his trumpet case.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The Mafia guys sit in the dimly lit room when Louis enters. He is startled and reflexively puts his hands up. The guys LAUGH.

MAFIA GUY 1

Sit down Mr. Armstrong. We're not going to shoot you.

Louis hesitates.

MAFIA GUY 1 (CONT'D)

My boss owns this club and a couple more like it.

Louis finally goes to sit down.

MAFIA GUY 1 (CONT'D)

He liked your playing a while back.

MAFIA GUY 2

He still likes his playing, Joey. Let's get to the point.

MAFIA GUY 1

He wants you to play at another club without Oliver. He stays here.

LOUIS

I appreciate your offer boys. You're not the first trying to get me to leave Mr. Oliver.

MAFIA GUY 2

Is he playing hard ball or something. Joey? Richy?

MAFIA GUY 3

Yeah boss, looks that way.

MAFIA GUY 1

We can pay you well for your trouble. We know Oliver's keeping some of your take.

LOUIS

I know that sir. Just figured it was his share since he got the job.

MAFIA GUY 2

You could do the same thing when you work directly for us.

LOUIS

Thank you again sir. But I can't leave King Oliver. I just can't.

MAFIA GUY 1

This offer's not coming around again.

MAFIA GUY 2

Come on boys. If you change your mind.

He drops a card on the table. Louis picks it up. Louis sits mesmerized and stunned. Jim and Lil enter.

JIM

What did those guys want?

LIL

Kept you locked in here. My heart was beating out of my chests.

LOUIS

So was mine. Lil, so was mine.

LIL

What? You still haven't answered the questions.

LOUIS

Nothing, I just.

Louis smiles.

JIM

Louis?

LOUIS

Oh, I told them no. They wanted me to have my own show at one of them other clubs, even told me about Joe on the take.

JIM

I told you.

LOUIS

Joe's not and like I said, if he is...

LIL

I'm glad you didn't say yes.

LOUIS

I guess I did the right thing. I just did what my mama would have told me to do for once.

LIL  
Well I'd like to meet her one day.

Jim exits.

LIL (CONT'D)  
Louis, you've been playing second fiddle long enough. It's time you moved on, but not like they want you to, on your own terms.

LOUIS  
Lil, I'm not leaving Joe.

INT. LIL'S ROOM - NIGHT

In a dark bedroom, Lil kisses Louis. Their song of passion has just ended.

LIL  
Why do they call you Little Louis?  
Nothing little about you.

LOUIS  
That's what they called me when I was a kid running around after King Oliver.  
What did you study at college?

In between kisses.

LIL  
I studied useful things like poetry, and geography so I know where things are, and mathematics so I can add things up and keep track of who's taking what from whom. And I studied music of course.

LOUIS  
I can feel that. Lil, I might have to marry you, you keep this up.

LIL  
Louis I can't marry you, a man who plays second.

He rolls on top of her.

LOUIS  
Lil, I have to get a divorce first.

She pushes him off.

LIL  
Well that should be at the top of your  
list.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Mayanne sips coffee at the little table. Daisy nervously  
takes a pan of biscuits out of the oven.

DAISY  
I know I wasn't much of a wife in the  
cooking.

MAYANNE  
Well now you know how to make biscuits  
real good like a man will like them.

Daisy sits at the table and sips her coffee.

DAISY  
It's been so long. Seems like forever.  
He's never coming home is he?

Mayanne passes the paper to her.

MAYANNE  
He just wants you to sign the divorce  
papers and both of you can make your own  
ways.

DAISY  
You want jam with your biscuits?

MAYANNE  
I want you to make peace with my son, and  
yes, I'll take some jam.

EXT. CHICAGO COURT HOUSE - DAY

Louis and Lil in a white suit dress walk hand-in-hand.

INT. CAB - DAY

Lil and Louis sit in the back of the cab. The cab driver  
notices them kissing.

CAB DRIVER  
Hey, no necking in my cab.

LIL  
Louis, I'm telling you, you will love it.

LOUIS

You want me to take a bite out of the big apple huh?

He bites her neck.

CAB DRIVER

Hey, I said no necking.

INT. OLIVER'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Lil and Louis sit casually while Oliver fastens his tie.

LIL

See Mr. Oliver, we're married now, and I have family in New York.

OLIVER

Louis is from New Orleans. That's where his family is.

LIL

He's my family now. And Mayanne is coming to visit.

LOUIS

Maybe to live, if I can convince her that she can find cayenne pepper in the stores here too.

OLIVER

Lil, don't you think you'd better get dressed for the show?

LIL

Yeah Joe, I'll see you on stage. Louis?

OLIVER

He'll be right there.

She leaves.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Little Louis, not so good. I could see Lil leaving. I could see you taking a liking to her, but you? Can I be on the level?

LOUIS

Yeah.

OLIVER

I can replace Lil Harding with any damn piano player. She's a dame with pretty legs, that's why I kept her around, but you.

LOUIS

Uncle Joe, that's my wife now.

OLIVER

Listen, think about staying, Louis. You've got a future here with me. We could do amazing things. Heck, we already have. I remember when you came by with that black-eye asking me how I played this thing. Don't let some dame use you.

LOUIS

I'm going to clean-up for the show.

He goes to the door. Oliver stops him.

OLIVER

Just tell me you'll think about it.

INT. SHOW HALL - NIGHT

Louis plays a his part behind Joe. The AUDIENCE CLAPS.

INT. BACK STAGE - NIGHT

Lil and Louis carry suitcases. Louis stops by Oliver's door.

LOUIS

I have to say good-bye to my Uncle Joe.

LIL

He's going to try to convince you to stay.

LOUIS

You trust me?

LIL

Why should I start trusting you now?

She playfully taps him. Louis knocks on the door then opens it. Lil continues down the hall then stops.



INT. OLIVER'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Oliver is changing into a casual jacket when Louis enters.

OLIVER

So you're leaving anyway? Couldn't get you to change your mind?

LOUIS

No, Uncle Joe, you knew I'd like Lil.

OLIVER

I guess it is my fault. I deserve this. I'll never forget seeing your face that day from the police car. It was the saddest thing.

LOUIS

I didn't know you saw.

Oliver hugs him.

OLIVER

Go make New Orleans proud, kid.

INT. BACK STAGE - DAY

Lil and Louis prepare for a show. Louis tucks a star of David pendant into his shirt.

LIL

Louis, this is your first recording. You want it to highlight your playing not your singing.

LOUIS

Lil, I love ya.

He kisses her forehead.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

But I will do my own singing. I'm bringing a little bit of New Orleans to the world, and trust me, they will like it, like my Mayanne's red beans and rice.

LIL

I hope you're right, Louis.

LOUIS

Sure I'm right, sugar.

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT

Louis in a tuxedo and Lil and the BAND play to a packed white AUDIENCE.

1945

INT. QUEENS NEW YORK HOME - DAY

Louis sits at a desk typing. Lucille brings him a glass of lemonade. Louis takes a gulp.

LOUIS  
Damn, that is good.

LUCILLE  
You want to take a break, Louis? The kids are outside asking for you.

LOUIS  
I'm nearly done now, Lucille. Just a little bit more.

Louis keeps typing.

1920

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT

Louis takes a bow with an orchestra behind him. He begins to play "Heebie Jeebies".

INT. STUDIO - DAY

In a recording room, the band plays, Louis is singing "Heebie Jeebies." When he forgets the lyrics he begins to SCAT the words.

CREDITS ROLL between documentary photos and brief information about Louis and his visits to New Orleans and his amazing life.

"Louis Armstrong was the first performer to record "Scatting," which years later would become a jazz standard. He evidently forgot the words and resorted to his innate improvisational style."

"Lil Harding Armstrong died after playing a tribute to Louis Armstrong concert, one year to-the-day after his death."

"Louis was such a fan of the health benefits of marijuana that he wrote a book about it. The book was not completed but is on display at Queens College where his archives are housed."

"Louis was the first black performer to play some of the big white venues, breaking down doors he never intended to walk through, but he did - with inconspicuous grace."

"He was also known as our "World Peace Ambassador."

INT. BACK STAGE - EVENING

Louis reads the paper. Lil is applying lipstick.

LOUIS

Hey Lil, that reporter called me Satchmo.  
I told him some kids called me satchel  
mouth when I was a kid.

LIL

Satchmo.

LOUIS

Satchmo. I like it.

FADE OUT:

## Vita

Callie Solano was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1967. She received her BA from the University of New Orleans in 1990. She hopes she is an inspiration to others to make it to the finish line no matter how long the journey.